University of Alberta

'Ageless Activists':
A Qualitative Case Study of Senior Environmental Activists in Alberta

by

Christy Louise Nickerson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Sociology

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *'Ageless Activists': A Qualitative Case Study of Senior Environmental Activists in Alberta* submitted by Christy Louise Nickerson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

In an effort to understand more about the influence of aging on environmental activism, I conducted a case study of seniors involved with such activism. Using a qualitative approach, I interviewed twelve environmental activists over the age of 60 concerning the factors that motivate them to stay involved with activism. Based on the findings from these interviews, a number of motivating factors were identified. Analysis of these findings revealed that age does not directly affect participation in environmental activism. Instead I assert, using Sharon Kaufman's concept of *The Ageless Self* (1986), that in order to maintain involvement senior activists much renegotiate the role of activism in their lives as they experience the many life changes that come with advancing age, such as retirement and declining health. I then suggest areas for further research into the connection between aging and activism.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a qualitative case study of seniors who are involved in the environmental movement in Alberta, Canada. As I embarked on this research project it became apparent that the topic of seniors involved in the environmental movement has appeal to many people. As I told friends, family and acquaintances about the topic I was planning to study for my master's thesis project, everyone responded with interest and surprise. There was interest as to how I came up with the idea in the first place and surprise in my putting two seemingly unrelated types of people together: seniors and environmental activists. Many people were afraid that I would not find people to interview and were surprised when I told them I had. These general reactions served to affirm that this topic was a necessary one to research. It is exciting when research challenges commonly-held assumptions.

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The idea for this research began when I read a book about the relationship between work time reduction initiatives and the environment. Anders Hayden's book, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet* presents work time reduction as an "ecologically sound response to unemployment" (1999: 32). Work time reduction would provide 'free' time for individuals to become involved in political, social and environmental activism. As retirement is a form of work time reduction, because it reduces working time over the life span, I began to think about the relationship between retiring, being older and being an environmental activist. Although work time reduction has not remained a central part of my research questions, it did provide the impetus for thinking about the relationship between aging and environmental activism.

From this initial idea and subsequent library research into the topic area, several research questions were formulated to guide this project:

1. **What motivates seniors to become involved and/or stay involved in environmental activism? and**
2. **How are these motivations the same and/or different from those found among activists of all ages?**

These questions demonstrated a need for talking with senior activists about their motivations for being involved in environmental activism. This strategy would answer the first question. As there has been much research about volunteer and activist behaviors among people of all ages, the findings from this study of seniors could be compared with those from previous research to answer the second question.

The research for this project involved interviewing twelve seniors who are environmental activists. The interviews were conducted in an open-ended, qualitative format. To answer the research questions, the interviews focused on these activists' interests and concerns for the environment, why they were involved in activism, and how being older affected their participation in environmental activism.

As the research progressed it became obvious that the research questions had evolved. Because all but one of the seniors interviewed had been life-long activists, there is very little that can be said about why seniors would become involved in activism. This part of the first question was dropped. The sample can only provide insight into the things that help and motivate these seniors to stay involved.

After analyzing the data it is clear that the main question addressed by this research project is:

3. Does being older affect involvement in environmental activism? And, if so, how?

Since I only interviewed seniors, the answer to this question still requires a comparison of the experiences of these twelve activists to findings from other research projects concerning the involvement of people of all ages in activism and volunteering roles.

FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AGING AND ACTIVISM

To understand the effect of old age on environmental activism I have chosen to discuss the findings within the perspective on aging and identity presented in Sharon Kaufman's *The Ageless Self* (1986). In her study using life histories of Americans over the age of 70, Kaufman found that age itself was not a part of the identities of those elderly people. Rather identity was based on a number of themes that were consistent through the lifespan but that were re-evaluated and re-interpreted along the life path. Age was not a central theme in an individual's identity, but the life events that accompany older age such as retirement, widowhood, physical illness and disability brought about the need for re-interpretation of life's themes to maintain a coherent identity.

This understanding of age as peripheral to identity helps explain the role of aging in the experience of being an environmental activist. It is not age itself that alters participation in activism. Instead, it is the events that accompany old age. At different phases in these respondents' lives, their activism changed as the situations of their lives changed. This continues to be true in old age. Despite these changes, core beliefs and actions that are central to their activism have remained unchanged over time. Just as Kaufman found that identity can be described as the 'Ageless Self' my study of these respondents' activism could label them as 'Ageless Activists.' In order to remain

involved in activism, the respondents had to re-interpret their roles in the environmental movement as their life circumstances changed with age.

Chapter Overview

There were many stages in reaching this understanding of the role of age in environmental activism. These are presented in the following chapters. First, I present a review of the previous research in the area. This "Literature Review" chapter has a number of different purposes. Most importantly, it demonstrates the need for addressing the issue of age's effect on environmental activism. It shows that this area of research has been missing in research on activism up to this point. As well, it provides a review of previous findings about the motivations of volunteers and activists of all ages. This will be the benchmark against which the findings from this study will be compared in order to identify the unique effects of aging and old age on activism. Finally, this chapter provides a discussion of the concept "environmental activism" leading to the definition used in this research.

The "Research Methods" chapter is a description of how this research project was conducted. Specifically, it describes the case study approach and qualitative method that were used. It describes how and why this sample of seniors was chosen. The collection and analysis of interview data is described. Finally there is a discussion of how this research project meets ethical standards for research with human subjects.

The qualitative approach of this research allows for a more detailed description of the respondents. The "Respondents' Profiles and Contexts" chapter includes a description of each of the respondents. This chapter is the backdrop against which comments presented in the "Findings" chapter can be interpreted. Each respondent is described with

regard to their age, their current living situation, family background, education and employment history along with their beliefs about the environment and a brief description of their involvement in environmental activism. There is also a discussion about the impact of the researcher/interviewer on the interview process.

The "Findings" chapter presents the comments of respondents about their motivations for being involved with environmental activism. These comments are organized into the themes that emerged from the interviews. Each theme is described and illustrated with the comments of respondents. For the most part, this chapter is descriptive, with discussion and analysis of the themes presented in the next chapter.

The final chapter, "Discussion and Conclusion," is a synthesis of the "Findings" chapter. Here the themes are summarized and explained in relation to the main research question of this project: How does old age effect participation in environmental activism? The answer to this question is discussed in terms of a particular theoretical perspective, that of *The Ageless Self* (Kaufman 1986). This project has demonstrated a need for further research. Implications of these findings for future research are also identified in this chapter. Further research questions in the area of environmental activism and aging are put forward as a means to better understand the role of seniors in the environmental movement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As explained in the Introduction, this research project asks how being older affects involvement in environmental activism? More specifically, what motivations do seniors have for being involved with environmental activism and how do they differ from the motivations of activists of all ages? In this chapter I will identify a gap in the research on environmental activism, namely, the impact of aging on activism. By reviewing other research in the area of aging and activism, I will then identify some expectations about possible answers to the question of how age makes a difference to environmental activism.

A main function of this chapter is to provide a review of previous research that will serve as a comparison to the findings from this project. The motivations that are a part of the activism of the senior respondents in this study will be compared and contrasted with findings from previous studies. Any differences identified will be analyzed to determine the effect of age on activism. As well, this chapter includes a discussion of the term "environmental activism". This is helpful in defining who was included in the selection of respondents for the project. I start with this discussion.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM?

There are many possible levels and dimensions to the concept of environmental activism. Activism can take place on a personal level. This could entail things like reading material to inform oneself about environmental problems and issues, making personal lifestyle changes (such as becoming a vegetarian, buying organic food, clothing and household products, or installing solar panels for household energy production), or committing to participate in community recycling programs.

At a somewhat more public level, an environmentally informed and 'active' individual could begin to engage in discussion and debate with friends and acquaintances regarding their environmental concerns and personal actions. This person may encourage others to become more aware of environmental issues and to become more conscious of the ecological impact of their lifestyles.

For the purposes of my research I plan to focus on more public, organized and institutionalized activism. This definition requires that an individual make a commitment to an environmental organization, a commitment beyond nominal membership. This is consistent with the definition used in other research: "In the majority of cases, environmental activism is defined as the function of an individual's association to an environmental organization" (Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998: paragraph 3).

By initiating active membership in an organization, activists take a visible step to identify themselves as having environmental concerns on which they are taking action. They are doing something more than most people do about their environmental concerns; "Environmental activists are people who intentionally engage in the most difficult ecological behaviors" (Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998: paragraph 3). This "most difficult ecological behavior" will be defined as membership in an environmental organization and by the self-identification of respondents as environmental activists.

Even within this distinction there are debates as to what defines an environmental organization. According to Adkin, "There is thus not one 'environmentalism' but many. There are competing discursive practices whose social bases are constantly forming and dissolving" (1992: 135). I feel that it is important to include what Adkin (1992) calls "counter-hegemonic" environmental groups. These are groups that are begun and

motivated by public or citizen concerns rather than sponsored or initiated by private or corporate institutions.

In selecting respondents for this study I decided to use a more demanding definition of environmental activist. Those included in this study had to be involved in activities beyond what I have identified as personal behaviors such as recycling. Rather they must be active within an environmental group or somehow associated with the activities of an environmental group. The types of activities they are involved with include public protest, lecturing, teaching, and fundraising. The groups that I contacted for respondents fit Adkin's definition of a counter-hegemonic group, those that have been started and run for public concerns rather than private, corporate concerns.

WHY AGING? WHY SENIORS?

Why should we care what influences seniors to be involved in issues of environmental activism? I believe there are a number of reasons that, in turn, make this type of research important. With an increase in average life span and the aging of the baby boom cohort, seniors are a growing part of the Canadian population. Seniors' behaviors and attitudes will have a major impact on society and ecology because of their increased numbers. In a time when it is important that members of industrialized societies become aware of their negative impact on the environment it is important to look at how the elderly are contributing to the environmental movement.

Not only is it important to understand the attitudes and behaviors of seniors in order to assess their impact on the social-ecological situation, it is also important to begin to highlight the role that seniors have taken in environmental action. Ekstrom and Ingman assert that, "the popular notion in contemporary United States is that seniors are

not capable of contributing to societal issues and are primarily a drain on societal resources" (1999: paragraph 6). They indicate that there may be a cultural belief that has hidden the contributions of seniors to the environmental movement, and that has created a barrier for more seniors to be involved in that movement. They refer to the argument made by Ekstrom and Pei (1995) that there needs to be a shift in thinking, a paradigm shift:

> In this paradigm shift, there is a need to alter the way in which seniors are viewed by society at large. The change in perceptions involves shifting the view of seniors as primarily a dependent population to considering them as a resource population…Additionally, seniors themselves need to shift from considering themselves only as special interests in need of assistance to recognizing their roles as stewards or trustees for future generation. (Ekstrom and Ingman 1999: paragraph 7)

Seniors need to be seen as contributors to the common good. This understanding of old age needs to be shared by seniors and people of all ages.

Researchers that investigate and highlight the contributions of seniors to the environmental movement help to initiate this needed shift in thinking about the role of seniors in industrialized society. Since seniors are retired from their working roles, it can be easy to believe that, as we age, we have less and less to offer society. Those seniors who are involved in activism for social justice and ecological sustainability challenge these beliefs and ageist attitudes. By describing the activities of these seniors, there is the potential to challenge stereotypes of the elderly and the potential to encourage other seniors to become involved in activism for issues which they feel are important, such as environmental sustainability.

Such research would also help to challenge the popularly-held belief that environmental issues are solely the concern of younger members of society. It has been

observed that "Environmentalists tend to be disproportionately young" (McAllister and Studlar 1999: 777). Many environmental debates are focused around the needs of youth. Attempts to evoke responses to environmental problems, such as financial contributions or involvement in activism, present the images of children and pleas on behalf of future generations (Laws 1995). There is little, if any, indication of a role for the elderly or even of the effects of environmental degradation and pollution on seniors. This is detrimental to the environmental movement: "Omitting older people from popular and academic, print and electronic, visual and verbal discourse about environmental issues denies their (potential or otherwise) contributions to both environmental problems and their solutions" (Laws 1995: 12). Seniors need to be recognized by others, and among themselves, as actors in the environmental crisis and as a source of solutions.

This research project will not document the extent to which seniors are involved in the environmental movement, but it will help to demonstrate that there are seniors involved in activism. As well, findings from this study may encourage further research in the area, including studies of the extent of seniors' participation in environmental activism.

It is easy to see seniors as the cause of many environmental problems as they are members of the previous generation that participated in environmentally degrading actions. But there is a danger in this type of thought. To avoid intergenerational conflict it is important to recognize that seniors can and have been part of the solution to environmental problems. By highlighting the fact that the environment is an issue that seniors are participating in through activist efforts, it will be possible to see how the environment is an important issue for all ages. As well, this research will begin to show

that environmental problems are not owned by older generations, and the solutions by younger generations. Instead both generations have responsibility for protecting the environment.

Because seniors are not expected to be involved in environmental activism they may provide an interesting case study to reveal more about the phenomenon of environmental activism. Aronson (1993) felt that examining hazardous waste activists was a good means for understanding more about the transformation into activism because they provide unique example of activists. They are unique because they are of lower socio-economic status and usually begin their involvement when they are personally affected by the location of hazardous waste sites. This is unique because most activists are of higher socio-economic status and become active out of general concerns for the environment.

Although this is not the exact situation with seniors involved in activism, there can be some merit in examining the unexpected to learn more about a social behavior. Looking at the motives of senior activists can help to identify the influences of age and aging on participation in activism. There has been much research into the effects of aging on volunteering behaviors; similar research related to aging has been lacking in the area of activist behavior.

The specific purpose of isolating the role of seniors in the movement is to identify how age impacts activism. This will help us understand the process of long-term involvement in the movement. As individuals are involved in activism, they are also aging. This project will help to show how aging influences activism. In understanding more about the interaction between aging and activism, we may learn how to get older

people involved in activism and how to keep them involved. Looking at how some older people maintained their involvement can inform the recruitment of other seniors, and can guide efforts to sustain those who are already involved with environmental issues.

Volunteering and Environmental Activism

Volunteering seems in some ways quite distinct from activism. Volunteers are usually less concerned with social change than are activists. It may be that different types of people participate in the two activities. Although there may be some differences between these two groups, "The roles of activists and volunteers are social constructions" (Wilson 2000: 217). As social constructions, the differences can be thought of as somewhat arbitrary. Many of the behaviors involved in the two activities, volunteering and activism, are similar. The main difference is the purpose behind those actions. Different purposes produce differences in the individuals involved but because of the many similarities they can still be studied together.

Hence, many social researchers study volunteering and activism together. For example, Passy and Giugni write, "Political activism is thus one form of volunteering, and these two research fields share many issues and problems that can be addressed with the same analytical tools" (2000: 138).

For this reason, I will review both the activism literature and the volunteering literature. Both are important in providing a backdrop against which to study seniors involved in environmental activism. The combining of these two bodies of literature is useful since there is less research on activism among seniors. I will first look at the motives for volunteering and activism found among people of all ages and then review findings specific to seniors.

All Ages

Volunteer and activist activities reflect who we are more so than does our choice of paid work. As Bradley writes, "volunteerism acts as a mirror reflecting personal values and identity. Because one engages in this activity with no expectation of monetary compensation, the choice of volunteer 'opportunity' is related to an individual's interests, personal goals, or life perspective" (1999-2000: paragraph 3). The motivation for volunteer work or any type of activism is motivated by something other than financial reward. Something greater than physical need is motivating our participation in volunteer work and activism.

It is believed that environmental activism is not simply a product of concerns about environmental issues. Just because someone is concerned about the environment, he or she does not necessarily take action on those concerns (Cuthbertson 1992; Wilson 2000). Concern is a necessary precursor to participation in environmental activism, but there are other factors at work in the transition from concern to action. Concerns or values do not tell us why people participate in volunteer work or activism. Rather they are important in understanding how individuals understand their volunteering/activism (Wilson 2000). Personal concerns and actions, such as recycling, do not necessarily lead to the political action that is the focus of this research (Sandilands 1997). The rest of this review will outline what is already known about the social factors that affect the step from environmental concern to environmental activism.

In developing a model of environmental activism, Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley (1998) reviewed much of the literature on motivations of environmental activists. Environmental activists generally have higher socioeconomic status than do non-

activists.[1] For volunteering behavior, "level of education is the most consistent predictor" of participating for a variety of reasons (Wilson 2000: 219). People with higher levels of education are more likely to be aware of volunteer opportunities, and are more likely to be asked to volunteer because they usually already belong to a number of organizations.

Compared to non-activists, activists report higher levels of personal efficacy towards the types of activities involved in being an activist. They are more likely to believe that their individual actions can help prevent environmental problems. There is also a greater salience among environmental activists about the threats of environmental problems to personal health and safety (Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998).

In interviewing seven leaders in Alberta's environmental movement, Cuthbertson (1992) found a number of common personal attributes related to being involved in environmental action. Some of these were a sense of being personally affected by damage to the environment, feeling a connection with nature, and having a sense of personal responsibility for the state of the environment. In general, most North Americans have some level of concern for the environment, but there is something more involved in taking the leap to become active to change things. It seems that there is a greater sense of personal responsibility among activists for the current environmental situation.

There are a number of factors that interact in their effect on activism. Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley (1998) summarized Guagnano, Stern and Dietz's (1995) proposed model for predicting environmental behaviors. In looking at people's participation in curbside recycling, they proposed that constraints and attitudes would interact with each other to predict an individual's participation in environmental behaviors. If a certain

[1] An exception to this being hazardous waste activists who are usually of lower socioeconomic status (Aronson 1993).

behavior is highly constrained, that is to say, very difficult to participate in for some reason, then the person's attitudes or beliefs in the importance of that activity will have to be very strong for them to participate in the behavior. Environmental activism is one such difficult behavior as it takes a great deal of time and effort, more so than participating in a recycling program. According to this model, the attitudes or beliefs of activists would have to be much stronger in favor of their activist behaviors than they would be if the behavior was simply separating paper from plastic.

Another model of environmental activism, developed by Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley, predicts that activists will have 'a high level of autonomy toward the environment' (1998: paragraph 41). They found that people who identified more intrinsic rewards from participating in environmental behaviors were more sensitive to information about the health risks associated with environmental problems. This in turn, made them more sensitive to their individual health risks, leading them to participate in environmental activism. People who reported that they participated in environmental behaviors, 'for the pleasure I get from contributing to the environment' or 'because being environmentally conscious has become a fundamental part of who I am' were those identified as gaining intrinsic rewards for participating (Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998: paragraph 20).

In reviewing the volunteering literature, Wilson (2000) identified three basic explanations of volunteering behavior: individual characteristics, relationships, and community context. None of these areas alone is able to explain volunteering behavior, but together they provide a more detailed picture of this complex behavior.

One aspect of individual characteristics is that individuals learn volunteering behaviors and values from their parents and through schools (Janoski and Wilson 1995; Wilson 2000). By witnessing volunteering behavior and participating in volunteer experiences, people find that there are responsibilities that go with their rights as citizens, one of these responsibilities being to volunteer (Wilson 2000: 219). Although not sufficient to predict volunteering, these values and a sense of responsibility are important aspects of volunteer or activist behaviors.

In a qualitative study of indigenous women who are environmental activists, Prindeville and Bretting (1998) highlighted a profound connection between the identity of those activists and their beliefs. Not only was there a sense of responsibility, as identified by Wilson (2000) and Hallin (1995), but, "The environmental ethic held by these women is integral to their spirituality and inseparable from themselves" (Prindeville and Bretting 1998: 51). There is a personal connection to their work as activists. These women also perceived the environmental hazards they were working against as posing a direct threat to either themselves or their families.

Aronson (1993) also identified this concern about a direct threat as important. In examining how hazardous waste activists became active, he found that it usually began with a personal environmental threat, such as a waste disposal site being built in the neighborhood. In talking with these activists he identified eight steps or stages these activists go through in moving from a private, personal life focus to a more public, activist focus. The personal threat they experience eventually pushes them to become involved in active public protest. In this process there is a re-definition of self by the activist. These activist concerns become a part of the individual's identity and purpose, as

was the case with the indigenous, women activists studied by Prindeville and Bretting (1998).

This transformation is not occurring in a vacuum, according to Aronson (1993): "I found that political activity precedes an activist political consciousness and it initiates the transformation of an individual into an activist" (Aronson 1993: 64). This supports the findings of Boggs, Rocco and Spangler (1995) who examined the activist behavior of seniors. They found that action in later life is usually preceded by a lifetime of involvement and concern.

Another personal-level motivation for activist behavior is related to emotions. Jasper (1998) is concerned that studies about the motivations for being involved in social movements have excluded the effect of emotions on participation. Generally, the emotional aspects of involvement have been excluded because they are dismissed as irrational. Jasper points out that emotions have an important effect on participation in protest and social movements. A sense of injustice is an important motivation when first joining in protest and it helps to maintain an individual's involvement in the movement. Sharing emotions provides cohesion to members of social movements. Protest involves emotion. The impact of this emotional aspect should not be ignored in studies about motivation for involvement in social and environmental movements.

Altruism is a common aspect of volunteering behavior. Most people indicate that they volunteer as a way to help others; it is one of the most common reasons given for volunteering (Fischer and Schaffer 1993; Janoski, Musick and Wilson 1998). This altruistic orientation may serve as a bond between individuals who volunteer or participate as activists; "Altruists share a view of the world in which all people are one"

(Monroe 1996: 13). This common bond leads us to examine how relationships and connections between volunteers and activists help to sustain their involvement.

One impact of relationships on activist behavior is that they provide increased opportunities to participate. Once connected to social networks where volunteering or activism are important, the chances are increased that an individual will be approached to participate, thereby increasing the likelihood that he or she will volunteer (Janoski, Musick and Wilson 1998; Wilson 2000).

In looking at what keeps people involved with activism, Passy and Giugni (2000) found that those whose social networks were well entrenched in their activist activities were more likely to continue on with that activism. These networks maintain commitment to the activism. These networks or "spheres", as the authors called them, included family, work, education, friends, and religion. The more of these spheres connected to a person's activism the more likely that person is to maintain their involvement. When a number of an individual's spheres become detached from his or her activism, there is an increased likelihood that he or she will disengage.

These connections and disconnections impact a person's sense of identity. By having more spheres connected to activities and beliefs associated with activism, individuals will have a more coherent sense of themselves as activist:

> The more the life-spheres are interlocked, or better yet, intertwined with a given political issue and the stronger this connection, the higher the chances that such an issue will become a crucial element in the construction of the self, and as a result, the higher the chances that their political commitment will stabilize, leading to sustained participation. (Passy and Giugni 2000: 125)

Having a number of friends within the activist community, being married or in a romantic partnership with a fellow activist, will help to create a coherent activist identity and keep the activist involved.

Finally, I look at the influence of contextual effects on volunteering and activism. The influence of social context on these behaviors is less well understood than are the effects of individual characteristics or relationships. This is because it is difficult to distinguish whether the context in which the volunteer or activist exists breeds the behaviors or whether the behaviors breed the social context.

It is thought that context can affect the type of volunteer opportunities within which people participate (Wilson 2000). The context in which an individual lives limits the problems or issues about which she or he becomes aware and concerned. An environmentalist in Halifax may lobby the municipal government to clean up the local harbor while another in Alberta is involved with protection of the mountain national parks, but both may be involved in lobbying the government to reduce CO_2 emissions. Thus, the context in which one lives can shape an activist's concerns. In the example, both are involved in different local area issues, but since they also exist in a more global context they share some common environmental concerns.

Since both volunteering and activism are not simply a product of being aware or having concerns, researchers have tried to identify the social factors that influence people to take action on their concerns. In reviewing this research, I have developed some ideas of what I expect to find among the respondents in this project. Based on previous research, I would expect that the respondent would have middle to high socio-economic status. Also, I expect that they will identify their parents as role models for their activist

behavior, as the literature suggests these behaviors are learned early in life and passed on from parent to child. They will likely think of themselves as having high levels of skills used in their activist activities. They will be aware of the impact of environmental factors on themselves and others. Because of this awareness, their activism will be motivated by a desire to protect themselves and others.

I also expect they these seniors will talk of their activism in ways that suggest a profound connection with their sense of self and with many different areas of their lives such as work and friendships. Activism will be a central part of the lives of these seniors. They will likely indicate that there are emotional motivations for their involvement with environmental activism. Finally, based on the literature, I might expect to see some uniquely Albertan reasons for being involved in activism, but without interviewing seniors from different parts of the country and the world, it will be impossible to specifically identify such reasons as regionally unique.

The next two sections of the literature review focus on seniors. First, I explain how age influences volunteering behaviors. Next, I review the literature that looks at seniors and environmental activism. This review will show that the present literature only speculates about possible interactions of aging and environmental activism, but does not present original findings from interviews with seniors about their involvement.

Volunteering and Activism among Seniors

As outlined in the previous section, there are many possible motivations for participating in volunteer activities. There are also a number of unique motivations and benefits for seniors. Bradley (1999-2000) outlines a number of factors that are associated with volunteering by seniors. These include integration into local community (indicated

by individuals expressing that they share common interests with others in their community), high levels of religious involvement, and higher socio-economic status (as measured by level of education and annual income).

In answering the question "What motivates older people to volunteer?", Bradley points out that, "the answer mirrors the diversity of older Americans. Each individual's volunteer experiences reflects, in part, his or her own personal interests, constrained by the availability of volunteer opportunities, and factors such as health, time available to volunteer, and access to transportation" (1999-2000: paragraph 15, electronic format). Nevertheless, there are some common factors. In surveying volunteers identified through a study by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Bradley (1999-2000) found that there were three areas of motivations: an enhanced sense of purpose, personal growth and continued productivity. Gaining an enhanced sense of purpose by giving back to the community was the most common motivation.

In a survey of seniors in Israel, similar results were found among senior volunteers. Among those who were volunteering or who wanted to volunteer ideological motivations (wanting to perform a service to society, to help others or to fulfill a citizenship duty) were most common (53% of volunteers and 37.5% of those who wanted to volunteer). The second most important motivation was to fill time (18.3% of volunteers and 18.8% of those who wanted to volunteer). This indicates that senior volunteers are more motivated by doing things for others than by fulfilling their own needs (Cohen-Mansfield 1989). A second study collapsed motivations for volunteering into three categories: altruistic, social, and material. The findings from this study contradict those of the first two in that social factors, such as filling free time and

providing a source for friendships, were the most common motivations (55%) and altruistic motivations were second (44.5%) (Morrow-Howell and Mui 1989).

This difference highlights the variations in motivation for volunteering and shows how survey findings can vary. Variation may have occurred because different populations with different motivations were surveyed or researchers may have used different definitions of motivating factors. Although my qualitative study cannot compare differences between different populations, it can address the difficulty of different definitions. In a qualitative study respondents have more control over the issues discussed, and it will be their definitions and meanings that are used to shape the findings rather than solely researcher-imposed definitions as is the case in most surveys.

An important point to keep in mind when examining the activism of seniors is that participation usually occurs throughout life. Values and beliefs that have been held over the life span continue to motivate participation in later years. Boggs, Rocco and Spangler (1995) interviewed seniors to better understand their contributions to society through involvement in civic activities (such as, working for health care reform or providing literacy training). They found that "It was not possible for us to find cases of senior citizen involvement in civic learning and action that had not been presaged by similar behaviors earlier in life" (Boggs, Rocco and Spangler 1995). In studying political participation among very old women, Jirovec and Erich (1995) found that past participation was the best predictor of participation in old age.

These findings support the point that Boggs cited in an earlier article:

> Political scientists have long agreed that political behavior is learned behavior. Sigel (1989: vii) summarizes the views which have been dominant for decades: first, that this learning occurs in childhood, with the family and school

> transmitting the knowledge and values necessary for citizenship; and second that it remains relatively stable and relevant throughout life. (Boggs 1992: 394)

It seems that, for the most part, political participation or other forms of activism begin early in someone's life. It is rare that, as people age, they would begin to participate in activism unless they had already held beliefs supporting such action.

Although there is stability to the political and social beliefs people hold throughout their lifetimes, it is noted that this does not preclude variation during the life span:

> In contrast, Sigel argues that the political self has a dynamic and constantly changing complexion throughout the life cycle. She proposes a developmental approach to understanding political learning, with the knowledge acquired in the early years providing a foundation, but a foundation cannot convey a clear picture of what the finished edifice will look like. (Boggs 1992: 394)

This is an important aspect of activist behavior to note for the research presented in this study. Seniors involved in environmental activism will generally have a lifetime of interest in such activism, but with variation in that activism over the life span.

The group, Seniors for Justice, provides an example of how age can affect activist activities. This group of senior women overcame the isolation of living in a nursing home to become involved in community issues such as circulating a petition to keep abortion legal and raising money for a local homeless shelter (Hubbard and et.al. 1992). These activities were inspired by lifelong values, but the unique constraints brought about by an aging physical body shaped the way in which these women carried through into action. This is one example of the variation that can occur in the lifelong beliefs and activism of older individuals.

Retirement is one aspect of aging in industrial societies that may provide for a greater opportunity to volunteer or participate in activism. Retiring provides individuals with more 'free time' which could be devoted to volunteering. It appears that those who retire early in a healthy state are volunteering at high rates. But retirement does not draw people to volunteering. Rather it usually means that those who were already volunteering are now able to commit more time to their previous volunteer activities (Wilson 2000).

Based on the findings of volunteer motivations among seniors, I am able to add some more expectations to the list that was begun after reviewing the findings about activism among people of all ages. I expect that gaining a sense of purpose in activist work will motivate seniors participating in environmental activism. As well, activism will be seen as a source for social relationships that may have been lost through life changes such as retiring. Despite these personal benefits, seniors will also be motivated by a desire to help others. Just as Seniors for Justice had to conduct their activist activities within the constraints of a nursing home I expect these seniors will have to deal with the changes of aging to continue to be involved with activism.

Environmental Activism among Seniors

Interviewing people who participated in a number of environmental behaviors, Hallin found that, "some motives were directly linked to the future of the informants' children whereas other informants, specifically elderly people, showed a more general concern" (1995: paragraph 19). This suggests that there may be age differences in motivations for environmental action. Hallin also quoted one informant, when explaining her increasing commitment to recycling, as saying, "Maybe it's just the age and feeling more responsible for what we are doing. I feel more responsible for it" (Hallin 1995:

paragraph 30). Although she was not a senior, she did note that, with increasing age, there was a greater sense of responsibility for the environment. Perhaps this increasing sense of responsibility continues to increase into old age.

Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) outline a number of reasons that they expect would motivate seniors to become involved in environmental initiatives:

> Those elders who do become involved in environmental activism have many different motives. Some are deeply concerned about the prospect of what their children and grandchildren will face as they approach adulthood. Many remember what the forests and lakes were like in the 1940s and 1950s. Others think of leaving a legacy. Leadership in environmental groups attracts many, as a means to maintain some sense of power. Some technically trained older people find that they can utilize the skills and knowledge gained from working in the chemical and engineering industries. The loss of connections after retirement is a strong motivating force for others. The opportunity to influence or serve as a mentor to young people is another powerful draw. (1999: paragraph 10)

These speculations about motivations indicate that there may be something unique that would compel seniors to become involved in environmental activism. These authors postulate that reaching the end of life may motivate individuals to want to be involved in the preservation of the environment as a way of creating something meaningful to last beyond the end of their own lives. As well, retiring from paid work may leave seniors with a need to become involved in other endeavors such as environmental groups. These authors provide a convincing list of possible reasons for seniors to be involved with environmental activism.

Based on these previous studies, I present some expectations of what will be found among the respondents in my study. I expect they will report an increasing sense of responsibility for the environment, one that motivates their continued participation in

activism. They will articulate a desire to protect the environment for their children and grandchildren. They will be motivated to protect the natural spaces that they remember from the time when they were young. They will be motivated to protect the environment as a means of leaving a legacy. They will be attracted to activism as a means of having leadership roles, using their skills, and maintaining social connections, each of which were lost with retirement. Finally they will be motivated to participate in environmental activism as a means of influencing younger people.

Conclusion

In reviewing the literature about the motivations for volunteering and activism it is clear that there is much research to guide this study. I have put forth a number of expectations of what will be found among these senior activists. But despite these previous studies, there is still an important need for this study. The interaction between aging and environmental activism is not well understood from the perspective of seniors themselves. Research about volunteering among seniors does not present much from the perspectives of the seniors themselves. Much of what has been written about seniors in environmental activism relies on anecdotal evidence of a growing trend of seniors being involved in environmental work and calls for greater research into the area.

Summing up there are many hypothesized answers to the research question: What motivations do seniors have for being involved in environmental activism? These include factors related to socio-economic status, family background, personal efficacy and skills, emotions, and identity. Comparing these expectations to the actual findings will provide an answer to the research question: How are these motivations the same and/or different from those found among activists of all ages? I expect that senior activists will feel

greater responsibility for the environment, and will feel motivated to protect their children and grandchildren or to use activism as a means to fulfil losses brought about by retirement.

As well, the literature suggests an answer to the main research question of this study: Does old age or being old affect involvement in environmental activism? The efforts of Seniors for Justice (Hubbard and et.al. 1992), constrained by their situation in a nursing home, supports the overall finding of this study. Age interacts with activism, not on its own, but in the fact that with aging comes many life changes. These life changes must be negotiated in order for seniors to become or remain involved in activism. This is the understanding of aging and activism that is missing from the current research. By talking with seniors about their environmental activism this expected finding is explained. Thus this study fills a large gap in previous research about the effect of aging on activism.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the preceding literature review, it is evident that there has been little research into the interaction between aging and environmental activism. Some researchers have identified it as a potential area of research based on anecdotal evidence. Despite the expected effects of old age on activism presented in these articles, there has yet to be systematic research done which examines personal experiences of being a senior and an environmental activist. This study asks how being older affects participation in environmental activism, and does so from the perspective of senior activists. The following methods were used to answer this question.

I decided to conduct a case study of senior environmental activists. Given the overall findings of the study, these senior activists comprise a case study of the Ageless Self. In the analysis, this study outlines how the concept of the Ageless Self is manifested in this one group of seniors.

This is not a case study in the traditional sense; I did not find an environmental group comprised exclusively of senior citizens to use as the case. Instead I found senior activists from different groups and through different contacts. These individuals did not make up any recognizable or cohesive group. In most cases they did not know of each other. But I am treating them as a bounded category of people or a case. They are representatives of the category of seniors involved in the environmental movement in Alberta and, thus, would likely not come together in a meaningful way except in the pages of this thesis. They represent their own individual views and experiences but, because of some similarities in their activism and their age, I have put them together as

representatives of the disconnected group of environmental activists who are over the age of 60.

For Merriam (1998), the most important characteristic of a case study is the ability to define the case. In determining the "boundedness" of a case she writes, "One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people who could be interviewed" (Merriam 1998: 27). For this case, the boundaries are the geographic location of Alberta, that age limit of being over 60 years old, and the identification as an environmental activist. In terms of case boundaries Stake says, "It is common to recognize that certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside" (2000: 436). Although senior environmental activists may not appear to be a system, as he defines it, they are a defined and bounded case. It is clear who fits into the case and who is outside of the case.

Using this case study approach indicates that I am more interested in taking an in-depth look at this one category, senior environmental activists, rather than making comparison between categories. Senior activists are being focused on in order to determine how one of their characteristics, older age, impacts the other, activism. This is not simply a descriptive case study, describing the experiences of senior activists. Rather, it is an interpretive case study. In an interpretive case study, "a case study researcher gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon" (Merriam 1998: 38). I am looking at this case as a means of analyzing the interaction between aging and activism.

As part of this analysis I will be making comparisons between my findings of this bounded category and the findings of previous researchers in the areas of volunteering and environmental activism. This does not take away from the initial purpose of examining a specific case. Comparing this case with previous findings will help to illuminate the situation within the case by identifying ways in which seniors are similar to and different from activists of all ages. These similarities and differences will guide an understanding of the effect of age on activism.

Choosing to conduct a case study does not define the method to be used. A case study only describes an approach to the research topic. A variety of methods can be used in a case study (Merriam 1998; Stake 2000). A quantitative study could have been useful in examining the case of senior environmental activists but, for a number of reasons, a more qualitative study was chosen. In a quantitative approach, a survey might have been developed to assess the motives of seniors involved in the movement and the types of activities they are involved in. There is much literature on the factors that influence the motives of volunteers and activists, which would have guided the development of the survey questions. Seniors could have been surveyed about their unique motives for being involved in environmental activism. Along with identifying the motives and activities of senior activists, a survey could have counted the number of seniors involved in the movement.

However, I was not convinced that a survey was the appropriate means to answer my research questions. Given my suspicion that there was only a small population of older environmental activists, I decided that an open-ended and more detailed, face-to-face interview format was more appropriate. Using a smaller sample, I have minimized

my ability to make general conclusions about senior environmental activists, but I have maximized the depth of description and understanding of those activists and their motives.

A number of researchers who have studied motivations of environmental activism support the use of qualitative research methods for such investigations. In reviewing volunteering literature, Wilson concludes, "we have learned more about the difficulties of measuring volunteer work, the complexities of gathering accurate data in this area, and the importance of supplementing survey data with richer ethnographic understandings of the volunteer" (2000: 233). Even in this recent review of many years of research, there remains a need for more in-depth understanding of volunteers and activists that is only possible through qualitative research.

Hallin (1995) echoes this need for qualitative studies, specifically in regards to environmental behaviors. He writes:

> Most environmental studies have employed quantitative approaches, and several of these studies have successfully identified a number of factors that determine environmental behavior. These factors, however, are most often related to specific behaviors, such as recycling, and they are not applicable to environmental behavior in a more general sense…This lack of comprehensive understanding suggests the need for explorative and qualitative approaches. (Hallin 1995: paragraph 5)

Additionally, qualitative methods are thought to be best for dealing with the intricacies of motives for activist behavior. Prindeville and Bretting indicate that: "Qualitative methods are often more useful than quantitative methods for investigating the hows and whys of human behavior" (Prindeville and Bretting 1998). In discussing the usefulness of these methods for researching the political participation of indigenous, female, environmental activists, Prindeville and Bretting continue on to say, "In-depth

personal interviews allow for detailed descriptions of the political beliefs and behaviors of participants. Long, open-ended interviews give the respondent special, non-standardized treatment. They stress the participant's definition of the problem, and allow her to communicate her notion of relevance" (Prindeville and Bretting 1998).

There are many different types of qualitative research, using different philosophies. I have chosen to use a basic or generic qualitative approach. Merriam (1998) outlines the basic tenets of this approach. First, a qualitative researcher is interested in "understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective, not the researcher's" (6). To uphold this tenet I have attempted to give respondents' freedom to share things of importance to them in the interviews and to preserve the integrity of their comments in the presentation of the findings.

The second tenet of qualitative research is that, "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (7). I conducted each of the interviews and did the analysis of the comments from those interviews. Third, qualitative research usually involves going into the field, going to the research phenomenon. In this case I went to the people of interest and talked with them. Because I was interested in the experiences of people, not the functioning of environmental activism, I conducted interviews rather than observation.

A fourth tenet is that the strategy for analyzing data in qualitative research is inductive rather than deductive. "Qualitative research build towards theory from observations and intuitive understandings," (7) rather than testing an already established theory. In the case of this project I did have some expectations of what would be found among these respondents, but I did not have an explanatory theory of what would be

found about the effect of aging on activism. Instead, as I analyzed the data I found that my findings fit within the understanding of aging and identity as described by Sharon Kaufman in *The Ageless Self* (Kaufman 1986).

Finally, qualitative research produces descriptive findings. Qualitative studies present detailed descriptions of contexts, and present text as data rather than numbers. This is the reason for including descriptions of each of the respondents in the "Respondents' Profiles and Contexts" chapter. As well, the "Findings" chapter includes a large number of direct quotes from the interviews to give the respondents' a voice and to allow for greater description of respondents' experiences and understandings of their lives as activists.

My goal in using this qualitative, open-ended method is to allow for more description, and to allow the respondents some control in presenting those aspects of their lives that are important to the development of their activist behavior. The point made by Boggs (1992) that political behavior is shaped in early life and evolves over the life span will be important in interviewing seniors activists. An open-ended approach will allow individuals to recount the development of environmental beliefs and behaviors throughout their lifetime.

Data Collection

This study uses a sample of 12 senior environmental activists. This sample represents different types of activism, different ages, and both sexes. Although there are similarities among these respondents they do constitute a "purposive" sample. It is purposive in that individuals were chosen to represent different perspectives of senior environmental activists rather than for the purpose of representing the entire category of

senior environmental activists. A purposive sample is a common aspect of qualitative research (Merriam 1998).

Respondents were interviewed in either one-on-one interviews or in small group interviews of two to three people. There were two one-on-one interviews, two interviews with husbands and wives being interviewed together, and two interviews with three people who were members of the same activist group[2]. This led to a total of six interviews with twelve respondents.

Respondents were found by contacting directors of Edmonton area environmental groups[3] and a research institute interested in political activism. Directors were asked if they knew of seniors involved in environmental activism.[4] I was provided with contact information for a number of potential participants. I contacted these individuals, found out that they were willing to be interviewed and thus began interviewing.

People were identified as being seniors and environmental activists first by the directors of the various groups and institutes and then by themselves. When individuals were contacted they were informed of the characteristics I was looking for in respondents. At that time they could identify themselves as fitting into those categories or not. In one case a name was given to me, but when I contacted the individual she indicated that she was not a senior, so was not suitable for the study. Others included themselves as seniors even though they were not over the age of 65. As well, each person identified himself or herself as an environmental activist. Although I had developed some

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[2] In one interview the respondents were housemates and members of the same activist group and in the other the three people were friends and worked together in the same activist group, but they did not live together.

[3] Environmental groups were identified using the Alberta Environmental Network Directory (http://www.pembina.org/aed.htm).

criteria for including people in the study, the overriding definition was that the respondents identified themselves as belonging to both categories of senior and environmental activist.

Interviews for the most part were conducted at the respondents' homes with one exception. In this case I met with three individuals from the same environmental organization at a local coffee shop. I conducted each of the interviews. Interviews lasted between one and three hours. All respondents were asked for their permission to tape the interview and all respondents agreed. I took handwritten notes during the interviews to provide a backup to the tape. Taping the interviews allowed me, as the interviewer, to pay closer attention to the progress of the actual interview.

Based on some of the findings from previous research regarding motivations for volunteering and activism, an interview guide was developed (see Appendix A: Interview Guide). The guide served as a reminder of the topics to be covered during the interview and outlined a suggested format for the interview. For the most part, topics were covered as the respondents brought them up, and not all questions were asked in all interviews. This gave the respondents some control over the progress of the interview. Even though there was an agenda of topics to be discussed, respondents were given the opportunity to share things that were of importance to them.

Data Analysis

The individuals I interviewed were able to articulate reasons for their involvement with the environmental movement. They had an understanding of why they initially

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[4] As well a sign was placed at the Edmonton Society for Retired and Semi-retired requesting any senior involved in environmental activism to contact the researcher, but no contacts were found through this means.

became interested in environmental issues and why they continue to be involved. The purpose of these interviews was to discern how these senior activists understand and explain their participation. This fits with the main tenet of qualitative research as defined by Merriam (1998), namely, that qualitative research is focused on assessing the respondent's perspective. I wanted to determine these respondents' understanding of their involvement with environmental activism and the effect aging had on that involvement.

Consequently, an attempt was made in the data analysis to maintain the integrity of individual's responses. Instead of looking beneath the surface of the respondents, comments, interpretation was based on respondent's understandings of their own behaviors. I have attempted to portray their interpretations of their actions and their social worlds rather than imposing my own interpretations upon their comments and experiences.

The data analyzed are the transcribed responses of respondents. All but one interview was transcribed verbatim by the interviewer/researcher[5]. This allowed the researcher to be very connected with the data by first engaging with it in the interview, then in transcribing, and finally in the detailed analysis. It is hoped that this brings a greater depth to the findings presented.

Other data used were articles, pamphlets and other pieces of written information provided to the researcher by the respondents at the time of the interview. These data provided background information about the activities of the respondents as well as detailing their interests and concerns for the environment. This information was provided unsolicited (i.e., it was not a planned part of the research project), but it was very useful

in understanding the perspectives of the individual respondents, in building their profiles, and in stressing how important raising awareness of environmental issues is to these respondents.

In the data analysis, each sentence or paragraph was treated as a discrete piece of data. Each piece of data was read and then classified into particular themes. These themes represent different motivations. The themes were developed out of the responses of the respondents. Some pieces of data fit into more than one theme, so they were placed in each appropriate theme. These themes are presented and described in the "Findings" chapter.

Ethical Considerations

When using people as research subjects there is always a need to address ethical considerations. To ensure respondents fully understood the study and the nature of the research process, they were given an information letter. Their signed consent indicated their willingness to participate, based on their understanding that their participation was voluntary, that they could end the interview at any time and that their responses would remain confidential (see Appendix B: Consent Form). As well, respondents were reminded again as the interview started that they could stop the interview at any time, and that their participation was voluntary.

Although this was necessary to inform these respondents of their rights, there was only minimal concern about potential risks to participants. Almost all of what respondents shared during the interviews was public knowledge. Their activist activities

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[5] The tape of one of the interviews was of such poor quality that it was impossible to transcribe it verbatim. Instead the most important quotes were transcribed verbatim while the rest of the interview was paraphrased.

occur in the public eye as much as possible in an effort to raise awareness. A few said they would be happy for me to use their names. They even encouraged it, because they had no concern about suffering negative consequences from sharing the information from the interviews.

Nevertheless, efforts towards confidentiality have been made. Names and other identifying features of respondents' stories have been changed to protect their identities. In spite of these efforts to protect confidentiality, because of the small sample size and unique nature of the group they represent (i.e., senior environmental activists) there remains the possibility that they could be identified. Because no secretive activities or plans were discussed during the interviews there is little concern of any resulting harm from being identified. It is more likely that there could be benefits, as it may help to disseminate information and raise awareness of the environmental issues of concern to these individuals.

CHAPTER 4: RESPONDENTS' PROFILES AND CONTEXTS

This section is included to provide the reader a personal understanding of the respondents who shared their experiences as senior environmental activists. These profiles of the respondents will provide a context in which to interpret their comments and the overall findings. Rather than reading a number of quotes from unknown individuals, the reader will be able to better understand the insights of these respondents.

In the following pages, the context and backdrop against which themes were developed and analyzed is recreated. Information about the respondents, specifically their upbringing, education, employment, family life, along with a short history of their participation in the environmental movement, is presented. An attempt will also be made to provide more insight into the research process. In other words, I discuss how the characteristics of the respondents may have interacted with those of the researcher, and how the interview context may have been influenced by these interactions.

RESEARCHER PROFILE

First, I include some background information about myself, the researcher and interviewer for this project. I am a white woman in my mid-twenties. I was born and grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Only recently, I moved to Edmonton, Alberta. Although I have a great concern about environmental issues, I have not been involved with the environmental movement in an active way for some time, and have not become involved with the movement in Edmonton.

These personal characteristics and experiences interacted with those of the respondents, resulting in an unanticipated dimension to the interviews. As noted, the individuals who served as respondents are very concerned with increasing awareness

about the environmental issues with which they are concerned. This desire to increase awareness came through in the interviews. Whereas my purpose was to find out what was motivating their behavior from a sociological perspective, the respondents were partially interested in informing me about what they were doing and why it needed to be done from an ecological perspective. For example, respondents focused on the needs of the environment as motivations for their behavior, not life circumstances that led them into activism. This created a teaching dimension in the interviews, with the respondents teaching me about the environmental issues of concern to them.

The teaching aspect of the interviews was intensified by a few factors. First, I am younger than all of my respondents. And most of my respondents appeared to feel a need to teach younger people about what they had learned in their lives as activists. Since I came wanting to learn from them, this desire was projected in my demeanor, giving me the image of someone open to being taught.

Second, since I am new to Alberta and to the environmental concerns of this area, I did not know much about the environmental issues that were of importance to my respondents. Nor did I know the history of the movement in this province. Hence, I needed to ask more questions about these issues. In looking back on the interviews, I realize that I spent more time than was perhaps necessary clarifying specific aspects of the issues in which they were involved. Because I was not familiar with the situations they were discussing, I asked for details, diverting attention from my main goal of determining their motives for being involved in environmental activism.

Finally, it became apparent during one interview that the respondents were expecting my questions to be about the ecological aspects of their concerns. Even though

the intent and purpose of the interviews was made clear from the beginning it seemed that the respondents were expecting a student from ecological studies rather than sociology. As this expectation became clear in one interview, I speculate that it may have influenced some of the other interviews. Perhaps respondents were trying to fulfil what they thought were my research needs based on an inaccurate assumption. This would have influenced them to talk more about their ecological motives for their concern and involvement.

Although it is important to keep these factors in mind, I believe they did not affect the integrity of the data collected so much as frame how the data was presented to me. The focus of respondents on the ecological aspects of their concerns reflects how important it is for them to be informed about the issues. Thus, I have gained an additional insight into their activism. Their concern for the environment is a significant motivator, likely the most influential. The strength of their concerns and the passion to share them with others is important to the findings, and also to the research process in general.

RESPONDENTS' PROFILES

The first interview was with three women who were housemates. I had initially intended to contact only one woman, Marie[6]. When I contacted her, I asked if she knew any other people who would be appropriate for me to interview. She said she would invite her roommates, Angela and Eunice, to join us for the interview because they shared similar activist interests.

Each of the women was retired or not working. This allowed them to spend a large amount of time on their activist activities. Marie was in her early 70s, Angela in her late 70s, and Eunice in her early 80s. All of them had completed high school. Marie had

[6] To protect the confidentially of all respondents, names and identifying information have been changed.

completed some business college. Her previous employment was for an environmental action group she had helped to start; she had worked out of her own basement. Angela had been married to a university professor and took some courses at that university but had not completed a degree. She had not been employed but had been involved in activist activities all her life. Eunice had completed both a music degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree. She had worked as a teacher.

Both Marie and Angela had similar upbringings. Marie was born in a smelting town in British Columbia while Angela grew up in a mining town in England. They both felt that the experiences of growing up in small, working-class town had shaped their interest in political concerns and protest. Eunice had also developed similar political beliefs but from a different background. Eunice's father had been involved in politics as a Member of Parliament. All three women had a strong belief in the importance of lobbying for government intervention into issues of social and environmental concern.

All three of the women were friends and were part of the same social activist group, a group that includes only older women. Although the focus of this group is not solely on environment issues, these respondents had a strong history of involvement in the environmental movement, and environmental issues continue to be of extreme importance for them. In describing some of their activities and concerns, Angela highlighted the importance of environmental concerns in their activism: "We always include environmental [issues], because they, because they're basic."

Both Marie and Angela had been concerned about and involved with environmental issues for a long time. Marie's concern began in the 1960s and 70s with issues such as nuclear power and pollution. Angela's concern began around the same

time, when she was involved in projects to protect people and the environment from the negative effects of nuclear testing. Eunice's concern and involvement with environmental issues has been more recent and less specific than that of her two roommates. She is aware of a number of environmental concerns and supports environmental work financially.

The second interview involved a married couple, Ian and Cathy. They had both been concerned with the environment and involved in environmental activism for some time. It was something that they did together, and it seemed to be an important value that they shared.

They were both very interested in talking with me. Cathy seemed more in tune with the sociological focus of my research, while Ian was very interested in telling me about the things that they were involved with as a means of informing me about the importance of their concerns. Although they presented somewhat different perspectives on the same issues, they had firmly held beliefs about things. There was no difficulty in getting them to discuss environmental issues as they were very passionate about them.

Ian was born and raised in Germany. He came to Canada when he was a young man. He was trained as an electrician. He was employed at this for a number of years before establishing his own company. He was very proud of the fact that he was self-employed. He felt that being self-employed gave him more freedom to pursue activist activities, as he was not hindered by the beliefs of an employer. Ian was in his early 60s and had not yet retired from his business.

Cathy was in her mid-70s. She had grown up in Alberta. She had a Master's of Education degree and had worked as a teacher for a number of years. She had not worked

while raising their children. She was retired from her work as a teacher but was very involved in activism work along with Ian.

Most of their concerns for the environment are associated with the damage inflicted on Alberta's natural spaces by the resource development industries such as forestry, oil and gas. Much of their time has been spent on lobbying the government to increase environmental protective measures, regulation on industry and in preserving parkland areas. This has involved letter writing, attending meetings and hearings, sitting on committees and attending protests. Most recently a lot of their efforts have been focused towards another smaller company they have incorporated to develop sources of energy as alternatives to oil, gas and coal. This involves increasing awareness about alternative energy sources, specifically wind power, as well as raising funds for their alternative energy project, building an industrial size wind turbine.

Their concern for the environment is tied in with their beliefs and concerns for social issues as well. They had a strong belief that many of the problems with the destruction of the environment were connected with social problems. They felt that people's disconnection from nature and from their work had a strong impact on the more rapid depletion of natural resources in Alberta.

The third interview involved another married couple, Kerri and Norman. I spoke with Kerri on the phone. I sensed some initial hesitation because she felt they were less involved with activism than they had once been due to health problems. After speaking with her for awhile she agreed to the interview. As we were trying to set up a time for the interview I got a sense that her idea of involvement was different from mine. She was hesitant to participate because of a decreased involvement, but we had difficulty finding a

time when she was not attending a rally or meeting! I was no longer concerned about their lack of involvement.

Kerri was the central talker during the interview, but this was a reflection of personalities rather than an indication that Norman was less involved. They were partners in working for their social and environmental concerns. Norman would often simply echo or affirm Kerri's comments. In one instance where Norman had just affirmed Kerri's sentiments, she said, "He gives me all the support." This activism was very much a part of their relationship. They shared similar concerns and participated together, but it seemed that Kerri was more in the forefront or more of the driving force behind their involvement, while Norman supported her and participated with her.

Both Kerri and Norman were born and raised in Alberta. Neither completed high school, although Kerri did take some courses through her work as a preschool teacher. Norman left school before completing high school to work on his family farm full-time to assist his father who had been disabled. Kerri was in her early 70s and Norman in his late 70s. Norman had worked for the railroad and had retired early because of health problems. Kerri had worked as a preschool teacher, and then as a receptionist for their daughter before retiring.

Kerri's first concern for environmental issues sprang from her involvement in work for the peace movement. She was already opposed to the development of weapons and the training of armed forces as part of her concerns for peace, but then she became aware of environmental impacts of the military. From this awareness about the environmental impacts of the military, she and Norman became active by lobbying government for protection of natural areas and for regulation of industry. The types of

activities they have been involved with included letter writing, sharing information (raising awareness), attending meetings and hearings, and participating in public protest. Their concerns centered around the protection of water, natural habitats and the impact of the energy and forestry industries on the environment. Their most recent action has been the purchase of a quarter section of land. They have designated it a conservancy. It will be willed to an environmental group to be left as a natural habitat.

Along with their actions for the environment, they are involved in a number of other political and social actions. They were involved in protests to protect Alberta's public health care system. They are members of a group for seniors who are active in tax issues, health care issues and educational issues. Their concern for the environment and their subsequent action are intertwined with other social and political concerns. As with the previous respondents their concern for the environment is not separate from their general concerns about the state of the world.

The fourth interview took place in a one-on-one setting. I interviewed a retired professor of agriculture, George. He took a very educational approach to the interview. He saw the interview as an ideal opportunity to explain to me the importance of good soil preservation. His major environmental concern was related to his area of life work and study, agricultural production, which is also related to his concerns about over population of the world. His feels that the biggest environmental concern is whether the earth will be able to support our growing needs for food. As part of this he believes very strongly that we need agricultural research to improve farming methods and technology to support this growing need. At the same time we need to support family planning initiatives to stabilize the earth's population.

George has been retired from his position as a university professor for a number of years; he is in his early 80s. He was widowed and has children. He continues to be quite active in the agricultural community. His main project involves raising funds to maintain some historical agricultural research plots of land. These fields have been the site where a number of farming methods have been tested and improved. The maintenance of these plots is important for continued research, as well as for the preservation of historical and natural environments.

There were three people interviewed in the fifth interview. My first contact was Edith. She found two other people to be interviewed who were active in her natural history group. Edith grew up in England. She was always interested in nature but when she came to Canada her interest in environmental protection increased as she saw, "the vast wilderness that [she] never knew existed." She had been a teacher and had raised her children. Environmental activism was always an important part of her life. She had been active in the movement for over 30 years and had never retired from it. Her involvement included sitting on committees as an environmental representative, giving presentations, attending meetings and writing letters. She was in her early 70s.

Lucy, a friend and fellow activist of Edith, was a volunteer at a local nature center. She was a lover of nature and was a member of the naturalist group to which Edith belonged. Edith described her as a behind-the-scenes activist. She supported the work of other activists by helping in the organization of events and letter writing. She was also concerned with other social issues and was involved in some activism through her church. She had grown up on a farm in Alberta. As a young woman she had been a teacher. She was retired from formal work, and was a mother and a grandmother.

Andrew was the other respondent Edith had invited to join the interview. He was unique from most of the other respondents in that he only began his involvement with environmental activism upon retiring from his job as a junior high school science teacher. He had always had concerns for the environment but found that retirement finally provided him with the time to commit to being active about those concerns. He first joined the naturalist group for something to do, but quickly found himself involved on different committees, speaking out for the protection of the environment.

The four of us met together in a coffee shop. It was a very lively discussion. These three activists were each interested in a number of social and environmental issues. Their major focus of concern was the protection of natural habitats, specifically parkland. They were concerned with the effects of industry on the environment and served on committees to ensure some safeguards for environmental protection. They were keen to share their concerns and their involvement.

The final interview was also a one-on-one interview with a retired university professor. Don had been a professor of Entomology. His environmental activism took the form of documenting natural habitats and the species that inhabit them along with educating others about the natural world. He was very concerned about the rapid disappearance of natural spaces and felt a great urgency to document in a scientific fashion their existence before they were lost.

He had grown up in a family where nature was very important. Both of his parents were educated in the natural sciences; his father was a professor. From an early age the importance of nature and scientific study were instilled in his life. Don took early retirement to work as a rancher. Then he completely retired to spend even more time on

research. He was in his late 60s. He was married and his wife was very supportive of his research interests as well as his concern for nature. Together they were members of a local group interested in learning about the natural history of the local area.

SAMPLE DIVERSITY

These respondents provide a good representation for gender and age. There is diversity in the family situations of these respondents. Some are single while others are married. These activists also represent different areas of concern; some are more concerned with agriculture, others with natural habitat preservation. As well, they have different philosophies of activism with some being involved with public protest, others with lobbying government, and others with researching and publishing. This allows me to say that this sample does fulfil the purposive expectation of qualitative research. Within the category of senior environmental activist, I have found a number of different representatives in terms of gender, age, living situation, marital status and type of environmental concern.

In terms of standard of living and education level, these respondents are more similar. For seniors, who typically have lower levels of education, this group has a high average level of education with most of them having some university education. Almost all of them owned a home, and all of them spoke of being financially secure. This supports the findings in previous research that volunteers and activists are usually of higher socio-economic statuses.

Now that each respondent has been introduced, the next chapter will outline the themes that became evident in talking with them about their motivations for participating in the environmental movement.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this chapter I have organized respondents' comments regarding their motivations for being involved in environmental activism. The most important theme that arose was awareness of environmental concerns. For each individual, awareness was necessary for them to become active; because of its centrality it is described first.

This impact of awareness on the decision to be involved in activism is tempered by a number of other factors such as the circumstances in which these respondents lived, how integrated activism was with their overall life, and their other motives for being involved. Individual circumstances affecting activism included the presence of parental role models for activism, life experiences such as traveling and personal characteristics such as confidence. Integration of activism with life describes how activism becomes more and more central to the different aspects of respondents' lives and how that impacts their involvement with activism.

These themes comprise the framework of meaning respondents' gave for their involvement with activism. These motivations include benefits received from being involved (such as a sense of purpose in life for the activist or relief from an emotional response to concerns about the environment) and the potential for future benefits (such as the protection of children and grandchildren).

AWARENESS

Activism only emerges after an individual becomes aware of environmental issues and concerns. Finding out about a problem or a concern was an initiator for action and a sustainer of action for these respondents:

> I think the best answer [for why I'm still involved] is the more I learn about it the more important I think it is. (George)

As respondents found out about environmental concerns they took action. You need to know about something before you can take action to change it.

From her awareness about peace concerns, Kerri was introduced to issues of environmental degradation. For her, and other respondents, environmental concerns have always been related to other social justice issues. It may be that those who are already concerned and active in social justice issues will have an increased likelihood of learning about environmental concerns, and also an increased chance of becoming environmentally active. Some of the same characteristics and motives that influence action in one type of concern would influence action for other concerns.

David Suzuki was cited by a few respondents as being an important source of information about environmental issues:

> And David Suzuki has been telling us that for a long time and we, we watched a lot of his programs and, ah, and that series he did which I still like to quote. At the very end he said, um, "If I'm wrong then you can plunder the planet all you wish, If I'm right…" That was it. And it really made me think about what we are doing, um, to the environment on the planet. And it affects all people, not just us. (Kerri)

> Where it's beginning, I listened to David Suzuki a lot, you know, and I believe what he says. I don't think there is any question about it that he is not right. (Norman)

> My first real, ah, involvement was, came during, Suzuki on the TV. (Eunice)

Awareness is important for these activists, and Suzuki is a trusted source of information for Canadians about environmental issues. Was he alone enough? Not likely, since these people had a number of influences on their activist behaviors. These respondents were a

receptive audience to his message because of other factors in their lives. Nevertheless, he had an important role of informing them on environmental issues.

The suggestions respondents made as to how to encourage others to participate in environmental activism reflect the factors that were influential in their own participation. A number of respondents indicated that informing others, raising awareness, was one of the only ways they could think of to increase concern and action among others:

> Well, I guess you just got to keep talking that's the only thing that I can see to do. Maybe they'll catch on, I don't know. (Norman)
>
> Well, I think it's very important to, um, to do what we can to, ah, communicate our interests to others. Especially, perhaps to the younger ones. To do this, in my particular case I've [committed] to give a talk or lead a field trip and, and, and I buy presents for people I tend to think in terms of bird books or plant books. (Don)
>
> Just about anywhere in life when we're talking about various things with people trying to bring any subjects up and try and be enthusiastic; to remember them and perhaps to pass them on to others. (Don)

Because awareness brought these people to activism, they feel it is important to share the information they have about the environment with others. The commitment of a number of the respondents to this philosophy of increasing awareness is apparent in their activist efforts. Many were heavily involved in distributing written information and discussing their concerns with those who are not currently involved with activism.

Awareness is the pivotal part of all types of activism. Awareness was the only way that these individuals became involved in activism, and because of the important role it played in their own activism they were committed to raising awareness in hopes of bringing others into activism. This is the most important theme to emerge because of its crucial role in bringing about action, but it cannot be understood on its own. The role of

awareness in cultivating activism in these respondents' lives depended upon a number of other factors. These are outlined in the following themes.

Individual Circumstances and Activism

Individual circumstances refer to specific experiences that influenced the movement from awareness of environmental concerns to action. Different experiences gave these individuals role models, skills, and beliefs that, once they became aware, prompted them to action. A number of respondents indicated their parents had an influence on their beliefs about nature and/or their beliefs about activism.

Parental Role Models

A number of respondents mentioned the political involvement of their parents or grandparents as being important to their own activism:

> Eunice: Well, I was born into [activism] so, that's one way of getting…
> Interviewer: So your family was quite, quite political or quite…
> Eunice: My father was in the House of Commons.
>
> My father was a Welsh miner. And there were very few Welsh miners who were not angry about what in those days was a very, very, very cruel life. And a hard life. So he was a strong trade unionist. (Angela)
>
> Angela and I are, have found a lot of similarities between our, um, the activism of our fathers, ah, impacting on or influencing our way of thinking. (Marie)
>
> Even when my father was alive, Ian will know, Ian knows this too, he was, he was becoming a, more and more, ah, vocal critic of ah, both local, you know, municipal and federal governments because some of this was slipping even then. (Cathy)
>
> Interviewer: What do you think was different in your life that might have made you see that connection, better than

other people have, that, that you have some responsibility, or that you should take action?

Kerri: Well, I don't know what to say. We both had somewhat of a background of interest in progressive politics. And, ah, like my grandfather was a member of the communist party. And, ah, ah, he was just one of the most honest people.

These parental activists provided role models for their children, showing the type of active responses people can take to problems they see. As well, they likely shaped the attitudes and beliefs of their children, leading to somewhat more progressive values and a general belief in the idea that people can bring about change.

There were a few comments made about the impact of parental values on these individuals' beliefs about nature and human's connection/relationship with nature. This was most profound in Don's life as both his parents and even his grandparents had been academics in the natural sciences and had nurtured similar interests in him:

> Well, um, I would say that, ah, I learned this primarily from my parents. And, my father was a, ah, a biologist. (Don)
>
> So I had lots of exposure to the environment through both my father and my mother. My grandfather was a geologist so I got lots from him as well. (Don)

He attributed a great deal of his beliefs and actions to the role models of his relatives before him.

Edith also mentioned some of the impact of her family on her beliefs about nature:

> Well, my parents tell me that I have been a tree hugger all my life. I was born in Australia and we had banana tree in the backyard and apparently because I scraped myself so much when I was two and three climbing through this tree, my father put strips round the tree that I could climb up. And when I was upset or happy or whatever I would go and climb up and sit in my tree. So, [muffled] but I just, I don't know. And the rest of the family wasn't all that interested.

> My mother liked birds; she fed the birds. She liked pretty flowers but she never knew one from another.
>
> So really, it was very much innate in me somehow and not so much the rest of the family. They like going out in the country and so on but didn't really take an interest. (Edith)

Here she downplayed the impact of her parents, indicating that her connection to nature was innate. It is apparent that although her parents may not have had as strong beliefs about the importance of nature, they still encouraged and helped to nurture her interests through their own appreciation of nature.

Unique Personal Experiences

This theme refers to personal experiences of the respondents that have affected their environmental concern or action in some specific way. These experiences include the opportunity to travel or having lived through a world war. Such experiences have affected these respondents by either making them aware of environmental problems or by changing their beliefs about the world and the importance of taking action on issues of concern.

For example, the experiences of growing up with a family who had progressive political beliefs shaped Kerri's beliefs to be similarly progressive. Because her family had been harassed by the police because of their beliefs she gained a desire to fight against such a system:

> When my cousins were just about yeah high the RCMP wanted them to tell them where grandpa had his books. You know, he, they were confiscated if they were found. And, ah, I mean, um, I guess some of those things had some bearing on, ah, my feeling that, ah, you just can't trust the powers that be. That's the way, the only thing I can think of that, ah, sort of lead me down the more progressive side of life. That was kind of a scary thing to me, you know. (Kerri)

Without these experiences her interest in the environment may have been quite different. Perhaps she would not be as politically active, or she may never have had a concern for social issues that led her to environmental concern in the first place. Experiences like this can have a profound impact on activist behavior.

A common experience that led to environmental activism for these respondents was being a witness to environmental degradation. In their lifetimes, these activists have seen a number of changes in the natural world. Natural areas that they used to enjoy for camping and hiking have become suburban developments or sites for industrial development:

> Well, I think like, that's part of my growing up. Like, it's [???] and I see areas going, on the North hill where some of those big garages are that used to be beautiful, ah, with shooting stars and, ah, ah, just kind of want to preserve some of that for my children and now for my grandchildren that was, ah, you know. We all saw these beautiful places being covered over with pavement and that, there. Is it really worth it? Just what is progress, sometimes you wonder. (Lucy)

> I think you look at things like that happening, first there's some of the wilderness areas, you know, that we camp in and so on and you go back and find they've put a road through or some thing like that. (Edith)

> Well we became aware about our surroundings. Ah, since we haven't really gone away from Canada on vacation, we kind of learned what Canada has…[Cathy: we hadn't, HADN'T]…we hadn't, we had not, and one of our major trips was to British Columbia and we drove over to Tofino and that was in the 70s, 1973? It shocked us, you know, the island was already cleared, cleared the beautiful rainforest. Right up to the coast, Tofino, Ucluelet, that really shocked us. (Ian)

> I think, gosh, you know, somebody's got to speak now because that west country that we all like, like to go to is just being destroyed. And there's, there will be nothing left out there. (Andrew)

> The natural environment is rapidly disappearing and that, ah, right now it is disappearing even faster so there is a crying need to do the research that I'm doing. (Don)

The effect of seeing change in the environment is not unique to senior activists but it is stronger for seniors as they have seen more areas disappear. The changes have been more drastic than the changes younger people have seen. Seniors are able to see long-term, overall change rather than just specific incidents. This gives them a unique perspective on the importance of working to stop or slow the degradation of the environment. Because they have witnessed greater amounts of degradation, they have a real experience and understanding of threats to the environment. Seeing the degradation, and the rapid pace at which it is taking place, provides them with a sense of urgency to continue on with their activist work. They have seen what happens when people do not take action to preserve natural spaces.

Three of the respondents in this study were immigrants from European countries. Although they did not talk about it in the interviews, this experience no doubt had some impact on their activist activities. For Edith, coming to Canada made her aware of natural spaces that native-born Canadians were taking for granted. For Ian it meant coming to a land where there was more freedom to speak out about your beliefs and concerns:

> And Ian having come from, ah, a country that was much less free then. Ian spent his first 19 years of life, he was born in Berlin. And, ah, so he, he came, he chose Canada after a brother had come two years before him, ah, as his home. And never looked back. In fact didn't go back for 19 years, for a visit. (Cathy).

Because of his immigration experience Ian saw great importance in speaking out and acting on his beliefs. He shared many times about the importance of being able to speak one's mind.

The experience of travelling throughout Canada, and eventually travelling internationally, was very important to the activism of Ian and Cathy. They witnessed some of the degradation of the environment in Canada on these trips. It developed in them a stronger connection to nature, as they spent time hiking, canoeing and camping in the natural spaces of Canada. It also strengthened their connections to other activists and people in general because, as they traveled they stayed with people they knew. They have been greatly affected by their travels, in their beliefs and in their actions. For example, on one trip Ian was instilled with an even greater sense of enthusiasm about their work as he was witness to the installation of alternative energy sources in another country.

Living through the Second World War was mentioned as an important experience for the development of activism in the lives of Angela and Edith. They had both lived in Europe and had seen the devastation of war on the environment and on human relationships. For Angela it encouraged her to be involved in anti-war protest because of the damage it inflicts to human life and the natural world:

> Angela: So that, ah, we all thought that it was absolutely necessary. I, I was in England during the war in London. So that, ah, I didn't have children then but, ah, but, ah, but I remember, you know, the horror of that. It was, it was, there was no romance about it at all. Some people seem to think there, that war is, wonderful, wonderful camaraderie and everything. You've got it between, on one side. But, um, but I really felt very, very anti-war.
>
> Marie: Of course, this was at the, in the 60s during the heights of the Vietnam War.
>
> Angela: It was horrible.

Angela saw war as the greatest environmental threat of all, because of first-hand experience. In Edith's life, her experiences of the war cultivated in her a greater sense of

responsibility at a young age, responsibility that has been carried through until now and into her activist activities.

This experience is a unique one to senior environmental activists. The impact of world war on environmental beliefs and activism is likely limited to those over the age of 70. As well, in this case both women who mentioned the impact of the war were immigrants from Europe. The impact of the war may not have been as significant for people who were in Canada during the war.

Personal Characteristics

This theme captures those statements that refer to personal attributes or characteristics that have influenced the respondent's involvement in activism. These characteristics shape the type of activism they are involved in, such as whether to participate in demonstrations or letter writing. The comments included here also serve as an explanation for why respondents are involved and maintain their involvement in the movement based on certain aspects of their character.

The emergence of this theme indicates a recognition by the respondents that personal attributes influence participation in environmental activism. It is not simply a combination of awareness of the issues, accompanied by the opportunity to take action, which leads to activism. Personal characteristics affect the transition from awareness to action, even affecting whether or not that transition will occur.

There are a variety of characteristics that have had an effect on the activism of these respondents. These different personalities made respondents interested in different types of activities. For example, Edith was well suited for sitting on committees and making public presentations, while Lucy was more interested in working behind the

scenes, organizing events. This suggests that environmental groups should be open to people interested in different types of involvement, in order to increase the possibilities for involvement of different types of people. Rather than just focusing on demonstration activity or committee work, attempts should be made to create opportunities for a number of different personal preferences for involvement. This increases the possible range of involvement, making it easier for many different types of people to become active.

One characteristic a number of respondents mentioned was their conviction and confidence. These were important attributes that had kept them involved with activism:

> Part of our dedication has been a feeling that, that what we're doing is the right thing to do. And time after time, it's been proven that we were right even though at the time we might not have been able to scientifically prove we were right… All of these things have come out that there's, there's some problem and we've protested them all because we just had this feeling that there was, well it was more than a feeling I suppose… (Marie)

> I meant it when I said there's a degree of stubbornness in the environmental movement. It's more so it's individuals, it's some individuals than others. I don't look upon us as being overtly stubborn but at the same time, well, I have no qualms of saying to an industrialist, 'NO, you know, what you're, you're not going to get me to sign that because it's wrong.' (Andrew)

> You've really got be tough [to work on committees]. (Edith)

> I sort of have, I guess, a habit of trying to defend myself, and, ah, making, ah, points that are pertinent as to why, you know. (Kerri)

> It's really important, you've got to stick out. For example, in political areas, when I see something that, ah, is being done or government promoting a particular area that I don't feel is right, an example being gambling…and, ah, when something like that comes up I believe in speaking my mind on the subject and to write letters, to, um, um, [muffled]. There is a better way to go. I try to be an activist

> in a sense, you know, it's very important to speak one's mind. Far too many people that don't. (Don)

There is conviction of beliefs apparent in these statements. These comments indicate that these individuals are often having to stand up for themselves and for their beliefs in the face of much questioning. It is their strength of character that give them the ability to withstand those difficulties and continue on with their beliefs and concerns. Without such strong characters, these respondents might have given up or have had to commit to different types of activities. This may be a common characteristic among senior activists as only those with strong conviction maintain involvement into old age.

It was difficult for these respondents to put it into words what had prompted them do something about their environmental concerns. Some of them said that it just seemed that they were simply more inclined towards activism than others were:

> I think just our own desire to do something. You know, cause we were angry. (Angela)

> I think you can take several different attitudes, you know, once you see this happening. You can either say, 'Oh well, you know, that's progress, that's man's so on, for our benefit' and just go along with it or you can grumble like mad and do nothing or you can grumble like mad and then one day you look in the mirror and say, 'Okay, what you gonna do about it?' And you get off your but and work, you know. (Edith)

These respondents were the people who said to themselves, 'what are you going to do about it?' when they heard about environmental problems. When probed to further identify this difference between themselves and others who did not act, these respondents were unable to identify things other than that they had strong beliefs and simply had to take action.

In Don's life, his overall drive explained his commitment to environmental activism. He was driven to do a number of things; research and teaching were just part of that drive:

> I get out of bed at five thirty in the morning but usually I'm awake at four thirty and for about an hour I'm planning my day, what I want to do. So then I get up and I go right to the computer and I'll work for an hour or so before I have breakfast and go back at it and I work all morning. Trying to do those things that I've lined up to do.

He had a high level of commitment and personal drive that led him to be a prolific researcher and teacher.

Hindrances and Supports

As with most types of social involvement, there are specific life situations that have either hindered or aided in the participation in environmental activism. Hindrances and supports are those life circumstances that have made it more difficult or easier to participate in activism. The most common life area mentioned as providing either a hindrance to or a support for participation in activism was employment. A number of respondents shared about how their commitments to different types of paid employment had affected their involvement with environmental activism.

Angela, Marie, Cathy and Ian talked about how having an employer can impede your opportunity to talk and protest openly about your concerns. Angela related the example of a group similar to her own that was affected by this fact. The group was made up of younger women who, because they are still employed, are hindered in the types of issues they protest about out of fear of being fired:

> Most of them are younger and still working. And they're working in firms that would take [action against them] if

> they were openly [involved in this protest group]. But we're not, we don't have that problem. (Angela)

Marie affirmed the sentiment that employers can inhibit protest and involvement:

> But is does make a difference if you have a job and you have to be [Angela: Yes it does] careful of what you say because you might get fired. (Marie)

These points were in regard to showing that there are some benefits to being an older activist. Because they are retired, they do not have to worry any longer about the effect involvement in activism may have on their employment situation.

For similar reasons, Ian and Cathy spoke a lot about the usefulness of being self-employed when involved with activism. They had seen many people restricted by their employment:

> So when I keep hearing that, um, I'm sorry I'm working for such and such newspaper and, um, I'm really an environmentalist but I can't say anything but when I retire. And we've been watching those people and they get swallowed up in the end. And they're not coming forward with their own personal commitment. But I feel very sorry for people like that. Um, I find them all over, all over the place and that's really very, very tragic. (Ian)

Because they were self-employed, Ian and Cathy were free to talk about issues of importance to them and to decide which types of projects they would work on within that company. This gave them more control over living out their beliefs in their working life.

Retirement, the completion of paid employment, provided an opportunity for both Andrew and Don to participate in the type of activism of importance to them. For Andrew, retirement simply provided the time to get more heavily involved in his interests in natural history and the environment:

> Um, well, when you retire all of a sudden you have this cut, you don't know about this yet, but there's this cut that occurs. There were all those people that you associated

> with all your life, suddenly they're going to work everyday and you're not. And you lose touch very quickly. And, ah, besides that, everybody I knew did the same thing. So it was kind of interesting to get involved with an organization where people do other things, besides teach school, so. (Andrew)

Before retiring he had little time for things outside of teaching:

> I just think that since I don't have lessons to plan and papers to mark every night, I have more time to get deep, more deeply involved in it. (Andrew)

Retirement was the catalyst for Andrew's involvement.

Don's employment as a professor did allow him to be involved with the issues of importance to him, but because of the political climate at the university he was restricted in the types of projects he could carry out:

> Eventually it reached a point at the university where I was feeling that, ah, there was a little too much in the way of politics, ah pressures to do various things, many of which weren't in the forefront of my interests. So I took early retirement. Ah, at that point in time I was full professor, I was under no pressure whatsoever to leave, it was entirely in my own volition. (Don)

Without work-imposed restrictions he was able to concentrate more fully on the types of research of importance to him. He had escaped from the boundaries of having an employer that others spoke about as a hindrance to activist work.

Edith pointed out that participating in environmental activism takes a great deal of time:

> And often things are frustrating, it's annoying, you know you miss doing other things. (Edith)

The time commitment to activist activities can be a hindrance. Don echoed some of this in his comment about being unable to participate as fully as he would like in both research and his family life. Because his wife spends more energy in caring for their

family, he is freed to devote more time to research. She has helped him to overcome this hindrance by providing more support in another area of life.

For some of the women in the study, caring for children had been a hindrance to more involvement in the movement when they were younger:

> So that's, I think, in the meantime, we were married in 1960, and in the meantime I was busy with our three small children and, ah, while I was very much interested I was much less involved in the environmental movement, things that were going on. (Cathy)

This hindrance was now gone in older age, but even at earlier times the hindrance had been relieved by supportive family members who shared the tasks of child rearing to support more involvement with activism:

> There was an executive meeting in the east, it was wonderful, and my, and I left, um, my husband was very good. He wanted me to do it and he…helped with the kids. And I had a sister who was sometimes here, and that, that somehow or other we managed to do a lot of things even then. But certainly now it is easier without the children. (Angela)

Even though help was there in earlier times, activism is still easier in old age when there is freedom from the commitments of paid work and child rearing.

Being older has provided many of these respondents with more time to devote to environmental activism because of release from work and family responsibilities. As these hindrances are freed up in old age, another comes along. Angela points out that they have less energy than they once had, restricting involvement at times:

> And now we're grannies, [chuckle] it's such, I mean it's such, that's one of the fortunate things about [being older] is that we do have, of course we don't have as much energy as we used to have. But um, but we certainly do have time and, um, more time than we did. (Angela)

Good health is important to being active, and this good health may be less likely in old age.

Most of the respondents I talked with were in relatively good health. Even though they may have less energy overall, they are still healthy and this health allows them to maintain their involvement. Cathy describes the impact of health on involvement:

> So I think if people are healthy and well, they're almost bound to do things that are good for the community around them. If you live a long time you get, to meet a lot of people and you get a lot of concerns and you're just about bound to put that into action, I think. Whereas if you're, if you're, you know, terribly, ah, concerned about your own health as I know some people have to be for one reason for another, or they've got themselves to a state where they're not able, ah, to anything for anybody but themselves, that's sad, and I think that's the case with quite a lot of seniors. - (Cathy)

Norman and Kerri were still quite active, but because of some health issues they had reduced their involvement. This indicates that poor personal health can inhibit activism among people of any age, but the chance of poor health increases with age so is a important consideration in the activism of seniors.

Finances are a factor in some of the work in which these respondents participated. The information-sharing activities that respondents took part in required a number of resources. As well, simply being able to devote time to projects requires some freedom from the financial concerns of having to work:

> And, ah, when one is retired, hopefully by then, it's true in our case, we've saved up enough money that we, I don't feel under the pressure of having to go out and work to have a salary. And, ah, so that's one thing, free time. (Don)

Each of the respondents in this study were free from financial worry. They each had secure means of income through pensions. Almost all of them owned the home they were

living in. Financial insecurity was not a major issue for these individuals but it does affect the ability of individuals to participate in activism. While my study cannot substantiate this, it is likely that economic insecurity affects the ability of more seniors to be involved in activism.

Education was not mentioned by respondents as a support to their activist work. Awareness was important for each of them, and some of this came through formal education, as in the cases of George and Don. But overall education was not directly mentioned as a hindrance or a support affecting these respondents' participation in the movement. The level of education among respondents varied from less than high school to post-graduate level but most had some education greater than high school. Although, there was no specific level of education associated with activism among these individuals the high proportion of respondents with greater than high school education suggests that seniors with higher levels of education are more likely to be involved with environmental activism.

INTEGRATION OF ACTIVISM WITH LIVING

These next themes speak about how activism becomes entwined with other life areas of activists. This entwining serves to keep activists attached to activism, therefore helping to sustain their involvement. This phenomena was documented by Passy and Giugni (2000). They wrote about how having activism connected to a number of different life spheres, such as employment or friends, will keep people involved in activism for longer periods of their lives.

This is an important part of the activism of my respondents, because almost all of them have been activists for a long period of time. Their ability to stay involved is

partially explained by the ways that activism has been a part of different areas of their lives and eventually became a part of themselves. Being activists is one way these respondents understand who they are, it is part of their identities.

Involvement

A few respondents mentioned that being involved with activism seems to perpetuate their involvement. Once involved, an activist becomes integrated into the activist community and it can become more difficult to leave. For example, Edith had gained so much experience during her involvement that she had a hard time finding someone else to take over the roles in which she was involved:

> But it's a real worry for people like myself who've been on a committee for ten years and have got, built up such a background that you can't find someone else to hand it off to because the amount of knowledge that has built up is intimidating and they don't have time to come. (Edith)

Edith's long-term involvement made her the most skilled for the job, thereby keeping her involved.

Continued involvement makes one more aware of other issues of importance as demonstrated in this exchange between Kerri and Norman:

> Kerri: Well, I think when you get involved with these different organizations and, ah, you hear what they have to say and you think, 'Oh God, I didn't know that.' And you know, then you feel…
>
> Norman: One issue then leads to another.
>
> Kerri: Carries on

This growing awareness of issues to be addressed makes it difficult to leave because there is an even greater understanding of the need for more work to be done.

For Don it was a habit to be interested in and taking note of the environment around him:

> And so from the earliest days we were in the habit of looking at the environment. Identifying what was there, um learning the communities. And in particular learning the changes that were taking place in the environment, um, along with the development of the land for agriculture, ah, for crops. (Don)

Because this involvement is engrained as a part of Don's life, it becomes even more difficult to leave environmental action. It is such an enduring part of his life, or it is so involved in his life, that it is difficult for him to even think of his life without his interest in studying the natural world. Involvement breeds involvement.

Social Support

Social support was an important influence on the activism of these respondents. They spoke of how having support from others had helped them be involved. The social support in these respondents' lives served the purpose of providing role models for activism, creating friendships with people of like mind, and gave them a sense of obligation to continue their involvement for the sake of others who were involved. These outcomes indicate that having social support is important for maintaining involvement with activism.

When asked what kept them going in times of discouragement, Marie, Angela and Eunice identified each other as important sources of support and encouragement:

> Interviewer: Does it sometimes seem overwhelming, sort of, all the, the injustices that…?
>
> Angela: Yes, tha, that's one of the, cause it's good to be living together. Cause we can let our hair down and, you know, feel, so, 'Oh my God,' you know, 'Is this worth it?'… You try to avoid being cynical, and, ah, and let

> frustration, sort of, stops you doing things. It's good when there's more than one, when you don't live by yourself.

They provide each other with a safe place to discuss their discouraging times. They provide each other with a sense of solidarity, assurance that they are not in the fight alone. With similar backgrounds they can understand each other and share this interest in activism. It is an important part of their friendship that they are involved in activism together, but it is also an important part of their activism that they are friends.

Friendships are based on similar interests. For the activists in this study, their activism and concerns form a basis for friendships:

> And I suppose that's another thing that's so encouraging, is that in the process of doing, of being environmentally active you meet a lot of kindred souls and its great. (Cathy)

> And, ah, now I find a comfort to be with people who have the same concerns even though not our whole life is centered around being with those people, um, who are concerned. (Kerri)

> Oh, that was one of the things, but. And, ah, so, it just seemed like a natural thing to get involved with a naturalist group. I guess I went on a couple of their summer excursions, first and thought these are great people. Met that lady over there [referring to Edith] but I think we have something in common. Then I met that lady [referring to Lucy] and we had something in common. (Andrew)

In some cases friendship brings people into activism as it did with Andrew. In other cases, it helps to keep them involved, as it did with Marie, Angela and Eunice.

Ian and Cathy spoke quite a bit about the support they had received in their time as activists. The company they headed up to support the production of alternative energy sources was based on the financial support of their large network of friends and acquaintances:

> We've been in it for a long, long period of time. Ah, and we built up quite a group of supporters. (Ian)
>
> A proactive project, friends with whom we were associated are coming forward, with investments. (Ian)
>
> People can actually take out their wallet and participate in a renewable energy project and it brings us together. We're a very strong group, stronger than we thought we were at the outset. (Ian)

They had been supported in this project, which was a source of encouragement to them. They felt very positive about the work they were doing and about the support they were receiving. For them activism had connected them with a lot of friends who had similar interests. These friends had supported them to become self-employed, a step that was very important to their activism. It allowed them to speak and act freely for their beliefs.

Kerri pointed out that the acquaintances she has made in her activist endeavors keep her accountable:

> Um, well, let's put it this way. Some of the very, very good people that we've met and worked with, I feel like I let them down if don't participate. And I feel that giving support to each other is very important and is, it's a compassionate way of, ah, ah, um, ah, thinking about what should we do and what are we going, you know, what we've done. And like Olivia said today, um, 'Thank-you for coming.' And I said, 'Well, Olivia thank-you for all the things you do, you know.' And she was appreciative that we came and I appreciate that she has done so much. (Kerri)

Here she indicated that one reason for her continuing commitment is to acknowledge and show appreciation for the work other people, who she knows and respects, have done for the causes about which she is concerned.

The importance of social support is emphasized in comments that it can be difficult to participate without support from other people:

> And um, the truth of the matter was, the environmental group then, um, community was really very small. So that a person had to be, um, really dedicated [to be involved]. (Cathy)

> Yeah, I've been called a 'Peace-nik' and I've been called you know, various adjectives that, ah, you know, um, one time, people that were friends of ours for years, and, ah, I made some statements one day and she said, 'You're really brainwashed' and I said, 'Well, I'm sure glad the corrosion washed off.' And that ended that, you know. But, ah, yeah there were times when, ah, you know, there had been some, ah, a little different attitude, you know because I was involved in. (Kerri)

As Cathy pointed out, without a large activist community there can be a greater chance of slipping away from activism. It takes greater dedication to remain involved. There is also the discouragement of others being critical of involvement that Kerri spoke of. Social support is important to insulate activists from those who are critical and from the times of discouragement.

Marriage is one specific form of social support that was important to a number of the respondents. It makes sense that people with similar interests in activism would get married but it has been found that those marriages help to sustain participation in activism (Passy and Giugni 2000). If activists are married to non-activists it becomes more difficult to continue participation. This seems to be true for respondents in this study.

There were two married couples interviewed in my sample. Kerri and Norman worked together, attending hearings and protests. Cathy and Ian worked together in their company and in other activist activities. Other respondents interviewed on their own were married or had been. George and his wife worked together in their mutual concern about overpopulation of the planet by participating in Planned Parenthood initiatives. Don and

his wife were both members of a natural history group. It seems likely that these shared interests and activities in activism had some influence on the sustained interest and participation of these respondents in environmental activism.

Employment

For a number of respondents, paid employment was directly related to their environmental activism. Marie had worked for an environmental action group that she helped start, Cathy and Ian had a company devoted to developing alternative energy sources, and both George and Don were professors of natural sciences. For these respondents, their environmental concern and activism were integrated into their professional lives.

The connection between employment and activism among these activists represents how integrated their concerns are with their selves. As suggested by Passy and Giugni (2000), this integration of concern and working life has likely facilitated these individuals' continued involvement with environmental activism. The more aspects of an individual's life related to activism, the more likely they are to stay involved in activism.

Leisure Activity

Activism activities are a form of leisure for some of the respondents, taking up spare time that would otherwise be spent on other activities:

> We don't normally have, ah, I don't go to dances, I don't go to the bar and drink, my time is on…Canada, is on Canada's future, with regards to, ah, protection and CO_2 emission reduction. (Ian)

> If we didn't have the concern, um, I'm not interested in things like bingos or things like that. I, I feel that their an empty addiction. (Kerri)

Activism provides these respondents with an enjoyable activity. It is something they find more meaningful than other leisure activities. Andrew stated that he participates in activism because:

> [I] need some thing to do. (Andrew)

He has spare time and is interested in the environment, so his involvement provides him with the activity he needs. For him, it takes the place that work once had in his life.

One unique observation about the role of activism in her life was made by Kerri:

> Maybe it's our addiction, I don't know. I mean human beings become addicted to different things. I mean, bingo is an addiction and I have a sister that doesn't…though she's concerned about the things we are she's not as active but square dancing that's their addiction, you know what I mean? So, ah, there are all these different addictions so I suspect that this is ours. (Kerri)

This explains activism as a habit that gives the activist pleasure. Using this description of activism as an addiction helps to show that activists continue in their activist actions even though they are not always receiving visible rewards. There are intrinsic rewards from activism such as pleasure, friendships and a sense of purpose. These rewards help to keep activists involved or 'addicted'. By fulfilling the need for leisure in the lives of these respondents activism has become even more integrated into their lives.

As activism gets integrated into different meanings in the lives of activists, such as leisure, source of social relationships, and a means of employment, it takes on a deeper importance in the activist's life. This makes it more and more difficult to disengage from activist activities, and helps to explain how the activists in this study sustained their activism throughout their lives, even into old age.

Motivations for Being Involved

The original focus of this research project was to determine what motivated seniors to be involved in environmental activism. The previous sections showed that the things bringing people into activism and sustaining them in that activism are not simply motivations. Life circumstances, like upbringing and personality, have affected how and why these respondents were active. As well, some of the reasons that they stayed involved were related to the fact that activism became engrained into their lives and into their senses of self. This section looks at the motivations for being involved.

I have presented these motivations as distinct from the previous themes because they describe respondents' reasons for doing the things that they do. Previous themes referred to factors that allowed them to be involved, or barriers that they had to overcome to be involved. But these motivation themes are the understanding senior environmental activists have about why they are involved in activism.

Reaction to Emotions

Respondents' pointed out that emotions play an important role in motivating activists. This was a common theme respondents used in explaining their involvement with the environmental movement:

> So, I suppose that, that some people will say that we're irrational, don't, don't have any scientific evidence to back up what we protest about but I think that, ah, not, it's not always necessary to have the scientific proof. There's also, there's also a feeling that whatever is happening is wrong and you have to protest it. (Marie)

> Yes, we have the emotional urge too. I must say we have an, I, I can only speak for myself, have always been involved in, oh, in the political part of it. (Angela)

Both Marie and Angela are not hesitant to show that some of the decisions they make in being activists are based on their emotional responses to the issues of concern to them. Emotion rather than proof is their motivation at times.

The most common type of emotional response was to anger. The effect of anger on activism was mentioned in almost all of the interviews:

> And so it started to, um, agitate us. We became gradually involved from, you know, from then on. (Ian)

> I think just our own desire to do something. You know, cause we were angry. And, there was a lack of social justice apart from anything else, of course that stirred us up the third world situation. (Angela)

When looking at the state of the social world and the natural environment, these respondents felt angry and agitated. Along with anger, they felt a feeling of injustice about the way the world operates. The anger comes out of this sense of injustice. It was these angry responses that motivated them to take action. Instead of being angry about the situation and stewing about it in passivity, these individuals were incited to take action to change what made them angry.

The best example of the effect of anger on activist behavior came from Edith:

> I, years ago, early 80s, was on a government committee, there was a lot of dirty work, etc. behind the scenes and I resigned very publicly but, um, I was so upset I was getting, you know, indigestion and I couldn't sleep and I'm not a person who gets like that, anyway. And, so, anyway, I was like, I had it, I can't live my life like this. I'm a grouch to the family and I'm making myself sick and so on. And I quit environmental work for nearly two years then they came up with a plan to build a ski resort and an alpine village in [a wilderness area], which I adore, and I was so flaming mad I was right back in there. (Edith)

Things had become so stressful for her that she had to quit her involvement. It was anger that brought her back. She was so angry that the threat of stress and burnout paled in comparison.

Although fear was not mentioned as playing a role in any of the respondents' own activism, it was mentioned as a possible mechanism for inciting or provoking other people to action. Andrew felt that the only antidote to the apathy of the general public about environmental issues is to create a sense of the environmental situation as catastrophic:

> If there was some way we could create an environmental issue that was as frightening to people then we would get politicians elected who could do something about these things, that we've been talking about. (Andrew)

The use of emotion of fear was seen as a potential motivator of others.

For Ian, a sense of enthusiasm influenced his participation. After seeing a very exciting project in his travels he came back to Canada with renewed energy for activism:

> Ah, and, ah, Ian had just witnessed the installation of a turbine of this size and everybody he spoke to, you know, caught his enthusiasm. And very soon the group grew and that, that's the beginning of it. That, that's what's happened. (Cathy)

This demonstrates that positive emotions can impact participation, not solely negative emotions such as anger and fear. That sense or feeling of enthusiasm was an important catalyst to the environmental work of Ian and Cathy; it motivated them and brought other support to their project.

Protecting and Preserving

The next themes identify the tangible things that motivate activists to work for protection and preservation of the natural world. These are protection of

children/grandchildren, preservation of the environment for the future, and personal protection. These are reasons that fighting against the degradation of the environment is important for these activists.

Protecting Children and Grandchildren

All of the respondents in this study were parents and grandparents; their children and grandchildren were mentioned as motivators by a number of respondents. As part of their concern for the environment, these individuals had concern for their own family members and for the future they would enjoy:

> And now, at that time [we first became concerned] we had children, now we have grandchildren and it gets reinforced and it's more compound, the problem. (Ian)

> I guess you kind of want your, your grandchildren, and now I have two great grandchildren, that they will be able to [enjoy] at least a little bit of what we did, this is our heritage. (Lucy)

> And, um, ah, I'm very new at this business of being a grandparent but, ah, you know, when I, when I see her and I think, gosh, you know, somebody's got to speak now because that west country that we all like, like to go to is just being destroyed. And there's, there will be nothing left out there. (Andrew)

There was an urgency to protect the environment on behalf of their family members. Andrew identified a need to speak up on behalf of those who cannot yet speak for themselves, a sense of responsibility to work on behalf of his grandchildren's future. At earlier times in their activist careers, these respondents were motivated by the needs of their own children. Now this has extended to include their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Respondents want to preserve the natural world on behalf of their family members who will live in that world in the future and who presently cannot work to protect it.

As well, there were concerns for the preservation of the health of their family members. Some respondents mentioned a desire to protect the health of their families, their children and grandchildren through their actions as environmental activists:

> So, that, you know when you have children, and I didn't, you don't know that your family is that riddled with cancer, or we didn't in those days, until you'd already had children and, then grandchildren. So that pushed me too, to become more environmentally active. (Edith)

The health of her family was a unique motivator in Edith's case. For her, it gave the need to work for environmental protection a personal aspect, because she could see the direct effects on her family. She wanted to do whatever she could to insulate her children and grandchildren from the threat of cancer, which was already present in her family.

Even though protection of her children was important, Edith cautioned that there was a greater call for her to the task of working as a environmentalist:

> As far as I'm concerned, I think, yes, your grandchildren are great motivators but I think if we go on the way we are we're going to damage the earth to such an extent that we will commit the ultimate immorality, to me, is that when we finish off ourselves we'll take everything else with us. Because we'll survive longest, possibly. And to me that's just total, as I say the ultimate immorality. (Edith)

There is a need to protect the environment for reasons other than human needs and the protection of humans; there is a moral call to it.

Protecting the Future

Although respondents indicated a concern for their children and grandchildren as a motivation for participating in environmental activism, this is a specific part of their general concern for the future of the planet and for future generations:

> But, it's not only our grandchildren, it's the future. (Angela)

Respondents mentioned a general concern for the environment of the future:

> We were lucky. We got all of the, ah, wilderness and all of these kinds of things but it's not going to be there, it's not going to be there for you [referring to the interviewer] when you join a naturalist group in your old age. (Andrew)

> Now if I didn't say one of the motivations was with what is going to happen for future generations then I certainly hoped it would be indicative in my concern of what's happening to our environment because I certainly feel that the future, is, is, ah, how shall I say, um, there are concerns for the future on this planet because of the damage we are doing to the planet for the sake of greed, I guess. (Kerri)

Kerri wanted her concern about future generations to be noted so much that she called after the interview to include this statement.

This concern for the future seems to entail an element of obligation to these future generations. Specifically, Andrew notes that the things that were there for him will not be there for future generations to enjoy unless he does something now. It is an obligation to provide those of the future with what he was provided.

Personal Protection

Some of the motivation for participation to protect the environment is for personal protection. Senior activists are not solely focused on the protection of the future or for their children and grandchildren but also want to protect themselves. Cathy mentioned this as a motivator:

> And even for ourselves because the extent to which we're polluting water and air, presently, threatens all of us, and in fact, the more so very young and very old, which we'll get to be eventually. Ah, so that, um, protecting the environment is a selfish motivation as well as a motivation, it's motivating also for future generations. (Cathy)

Here she indicates that environmental changes impact seniors. Even if they will not be living as long as their children will, the impacts are still there. Cathy points out that

environmental threats may be more severe for seniors because of their failing health. Seniors' health may be as affected by the environment as is children's health.

Kerri mentioned that when the effects of environmental change impact people directly, they may be more likely to become involved with activism:

> Although I do feel that there's a concern now among a few more than there used to be, maybe not activism but they're starting concern, get concerned. And when they start paying their bills for the energy and, and that you know, that we are consuming, the way they're going up they're going to have to find themselves a little more concerned. (Kerri)

Out of concern for their own financial well-being, these individuals may become involved to oppose rising energy costs.

These different motivators show that seniors, like activists of other ages, are concerned for their families, the future, and even themselves. These concerns have prompted action among the respondents. These findings are consistent with the prediction of Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) that senior activists would be concerned for their children and grandchildren. It also points out that they are not simply concerned for others. Personal protection is still important to them even though they many never experience all the negative effects of environmental degradation. This suggests that recruitment of seniors to environmental activism should emphasize the need to protect the environment for present benefits as well as for long-term protection.

A Sense of Purpose

For some of the respondents, activism provided them with a sense of purpose and gave value to their lives and activities. Many respondents had a strong belief that the

activities they were a part of as activists were important. There was purpose in being activists:

> No, I think it's a valuable, we, we feel that what we're doing has some value. You know, I don't think we exaggerate that, but we do feel, what, going out and singing to a number of people about issues. Even if they don't agree it makes them think sometimes, you know, about the points that we make. (Angela)

> At least you feel like you're trying to do something. Even if you're not successful you feel like you're trying to do something. (Eunice)

> And this is how we were feeling, then, we've come to a point now where we're doing something very positive and we feel great about it. And this is, you see the sign, you may have heard that we're very involved in promoting wind power. And it's feels so good because it's positive, we're promoting something good instead of hammering something bad, which really does get very debilitating. (Cathy)

They did not directly relate this value in their activist work to the value of their lives in general but they saw purpose and importance in activism, which was a big part of their lives. As Eunice said, they need to feel they are doing something important.

For Don, a sense of purpose was a very strong theme in his activism. This sense of purpose fit with his overall drive and goal-orientation. Because he felt that the research he was doing was being done by so few, and that it was important work, his commitment to his work gave his life meaning. He connected the purpose in his activist work to his own life purpose as he stated that it provided him with a will to live:

> Ah, I'm interested in it. I feel it's important. I can see that no one else is doing a lot of the things I am doing so I'm making a unique contribution.

> It's given me a real will to live. Um, because, ah, things I want to leave and when I get doing these things I realize once again that, hey these are important things. Um, and if

> I'm not going to do them, no one else is going to do many of them. Um, so just get out and do it. (Don)

This was a strong theme for him. His research had a profound impact on how he understood his purpose in life.

Leaving a Legacy

Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) mentioned that one unique motivation for seniors in environmental activism could be the desire to leave a legacy of a better preserved environment to future generations after the senior's death. In discussing their concerns for the future only Kerri indicated a desire for leaving a legacy as part of her motive for working in environmental activism:

> And, ah, I surely didn't want to leave this planet without trying to make it better place before I leave it. (Kerri)

Although most respondents did not speak of wanting to leave something behind after their deaths, their actions indicate a desire to do so. Many of those interviewed were involved with projects that would result in establishing a piece of land as a natural, preserved area, or in the building of an environmentally friendly energy structure as part of their environmental activism. They have a general focus on preserving the environment for their children and for future generations. There is no direct desire to be recognized for these efforts in the sense of leaving a legacy, but there is a desire to leave something good behind after their lives are over.

Urgency

Among most of the respondents there was a sense of urgency in their discussion of their environmental concerns. They saw change happening quickly and did not feel there is time for slow response to those changes:

> Interviewer: Would you say that your involvement with environmental issues has changed since you first, first got, were concerned? Have there been changes over the time that you've been involved?
>
> Kerri: More, more concerned because things are really getting worse instead of better.
>
> Norman: Yes, it's getting worse all the time. I don't know when the end is, ah, going to come. But our concerns are, it's just pretty hard to say what hope there is for the future. It's bad, very bad.
>
> And it's going fast, 10 years ago my daughter bought a cabin, essentially in the wilderness about twenty-six kilometers north of [???] and they're clear cutting all the way around it. (Lucy)
>
> But there has to a ground swell, and education is fine but education is so slow and some of us aren't convinced that there's that much time left for slower other than, of education before there's some kind of a collapse, who know what it will be. (Andrew)

They have seen things deteriorate. As time has gone on they see things worsening rather than improving and this gives them a more intense desire to work for change.

The theme of urgency was prevalent in Don's life. He mentioned a number of times the rapid disappearance of natural, undisturbed spaces and the need to document them now before it is too late:

> And, ah, this interest has stayed with me all my life. If anything, its even more, ah, in the forefront now than it was back then. (Don)

This urgency has increased for him as he has become older. He was the only one to directly put into words that his own mortality gives him a sense of urgency about the work he is doing:

> And, I [???] myself, ah, as having perhaps if I'm lucky another 20 years as well. And, ah, as time goes on I've seen a lot of friends that have had Alzheimer's and things like that. Their mind isn't working perhaps at the same level that they were, they would like it to be working at. So, I'm trying to do as much as I can while I'm still here. It's just the thing to do. (Don)

Because he sees his work as unique and as documenting a disappearing resource he recognizes that with his own demise the opportunity for these areas to be documented will be lost. This gives him a strong motivation to continue working.

Being older has added to this sense of urgency in these respondents' activism. Activists of all ages may understand a need for quick action, but these older activists have seen rapid disappearance of natural areas and the need for action is more real to them. They have witnessed long-term environmental destruction, not just read about it. They also see their own lives coming to an end, which can give rise to a greater sense of urgency about the environmental situation and the role they can play in it.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The themes that arose in talking with these senior activists provide some insights into why seniors are involved in activism. Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter, I have compiled a summary of motivations for seniors' involvement in environmental activism. The first section of this final chapter outlines how these findings on senior activists fit with previous research on activists of all ages. The next section highlights those motivations that were expected based on previous research about senior volunteers and activists. I then look at the effect of age on activism from the standpoint of *The Ageless Self* (1986). Finally, I suggest areas for further research.

SIMILARITIES WITH ACTIVISTS OF ALL AGES

These respondents' stories were consistent with many of the expected findings from the literature review. Each of the respondents in the study was financially secure and most had a high level of education. This supports the finding that activists are generally of higher social economic status (Wilson 2000; Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998).

Family history does impact activist behavior. Respondents indicated the importance of having parental role models for activist behavior, or at least parents who cultivated progressive beliefs about the social and environmental world. This was an important influence in a number of the respondents' lives. This is consistent with the expectation from the literature review that cultivating volunteer or activist behaviors in early life will impact involvement for life (Wilson 2000; Janoski 1995). Early experiences with parents helped to cultivate a connection to nature in these respondents.

This is also a finding from previous research, that environmental activists articulate a connection to nature (Cuthbertson 1992).

The impact of emotions on the motivation to participate in environmental activism was evident in the lives of these respondents. They spoke of how anger, a sense of injustice, and even enthusiasm motivated them to join and continue on in their environmental activism. This lends support to Jasper's (1998) thesis that emotions should no longer be ignored in the study of activist behavior. They have a large impact on involvement. This impact plays a role throughout an activist's life. The effect of emotions on involvement was evident throughout these respondents' activist careers; it was by no means limited to later life. This is not a unique motivation for seniors.

In terms of identifying a high level of skill for activist work (Sequin, Pelletier and Hunsley 1998) these senior activists only spoke in terms of confidence. They spoke of the importance of being confident in fighting for their beliefs. This is reported as a personal characteristic that supports involvement.

Overall findings from these senior environmental activists support findings from previous research on all age groups. The next section examines the unique motivations for seniors expected from previous research.

Uniqueness of Senior Activists

One motivation that respondents identified for being involved in activism was a desire to protect the future of the earth for either their children, grandchildren or people in general. This indicates that a motivation for environmental activism is to protect others. Altruism was found to be a common motivation for volunteer behavior among seniors (Cohen-Mansfield 1989; Morrow-Howell and Mui 1989). This finding supports the

expectation from Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky that seniors would be prompted to activism because they are, "deeply concerned about the prospect of what their children and grandchildren will face as they approach adulthood." (1999: paragraph 10).

While this altruistic motivation exists among these senior activits, it would be a mistake to think that seniors are only motivated by the needs of others. These respondents could see the impact of environmental concerns on their own lives and health, and this was also a motivation. This is an important finding. Recruitment of seniors should not simply focus on the needs of the future or on the needs of their children and grandchildren, but should also include efforts to show how seniors themselves can be impacted by environmental degradation. Although the prediction by Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) was found among these respondents, personal protection as a motivator should not be ignored among seniors. Even though seniors may be seen as having a shorter life span, they will still be impacted by environmental change and this should be emphasized. It would ensure that even those seniors who are without children or grandchildren could see the personal impact of the environment on their lives.

Witnessing the degradation of the environment was a common experience that influenced these seniors' activism. As immigrants, some of the respondents saw degradation in Europe that was much more drastic than in Canada, spurring them on to protect the Canadian wilderness. In traveling, some respondents saw how degradation had occurred in other parts of the country. Overall, the experience of living for seventy years and noting the changes to the environment over that time gave these respondents a first hand understanding of the type of environmental changes they were fighting to slow or stop. Because they were older, they had seen more that could motivate them.

In some ways this is a unique aspect of being an older person in the environmental movement, as was predicted by Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) but there are elements of this that could occur for someone at any age who was concerned with the environment and took note of the changes they saw. Nevertheless, greater age appears to give a stronger and more long-term understanding of the changes to the environment that are possible if activism does not occur.

In looking at the hindrances and supports that are present for activist behaviors, employment or work was very important among these respondents. Many of them mentioned the benefit of being released from the time commitment of paid employment because of retirement. Older people have fewer employment commitments, which allows them to be more heavily involved with activism. This is an important resource that should be tapped by the environmental movement.

This finding supports the thesis of Hayden (1999) that freedom from paid work, through work time reduction, could increase participation in environmental activism, and is consistent with the expectation that retirement would give greater opportunity to be involved. These respondents were more involved or felt freer to be involved in the ways they wanted because they were freed from work responsibilities. In only one case was retirement the catalyst for involvement. For the rest, retirement allowed them to focus more time on an interest and activity that had been present in their pre-retirement life. For the women in this study retirement was not a source of freedom, but rather the freedom of no longer having to care for their children was important in allowing them to commit more time to activism. In both cases, old age coincided with a decrease in other responsibilities, allowing for activism to take a more central role in their lives.

Although aging did bring about new freedom to commit more time to activism, it was also accompanied by some decline in health and physical energy level. Most respondents in this study had increased their participation as they got older but they were aware of the restrictions their health could eventually play in their involvement. Some even mentioned that they could already notice a decrease in the amount of physical energy they had to give to activism. It can be concluded that being older is not necessarily the easiest time to be involved with activism; each stage of life comes with its helps and hindrances to being involved in activism. As individuals age, they meet different challenges which they must negotiate in order to maintain their involvement in activism. In old age, failing health is one such challenge.

Since the seniors interviewed in this research had been involved with environmental activism for a number of years, if not their entire adult life, this is not just a study of the unique aspects of being a senior activist but is also an investigation into what sustains participation in environmental activism. Passy and Giugni (2000) provide one part of the explanation of how activism is sustained after the initial motivation to join. It was expected that integration of the actions and beliefs of activism with other parts of an individual's life, and with the individual's understanding of self, would be something that helped respondents maintain their involvement. This was evident in the lives of these respondents.

Activism was found to be a part of the employment, education, social relationships and leisure activities of these respondents. Many spoke of how being involved with activism breeds continued activism. In this way, activism sustains itself. When respondents spoke of activism as their leisure activity, it indicated that activism

had now taken on multiple roles or meanings in their lives. It served the main purpose of combating environmental problems, but also became a means of leisure for the activists, a way to fill their free time meaningfully. It was also the source of friendships. The respondents found more meaningful friendships through their activism because they met with people who had similar values and beliefs.

This supports the finding that the connection of activism to different areas of life will sustain activism. It seems that the longer an individual is involved in activism, the more it becomes connected to areas of his/her life. Longer involvement means more connection with life areas which leads to increased likelihood of maintaining involvement. Seniors have the potential to gain the most from this phenomenon. If they have been involved for a long time, activism will be well integrated into their lives, more than at any other age.

Activism provided the respondents with a sense of purpose in their lives. Bradley (1999-2000) found that an enhanced sense of purpose and continued productivity were two of the most important motivations for senior volunteers. Environmental activism can obviously fill these roles as it did in the lives of these respondents. It provided them purpose in working for their beliefs, as it would for people of any age, but it also provided a purpose for the increased free time they experienced as retired people, a unique benefit for seniors.

Part of this sense of purpose could be an interest in leaving a legacy through environmental work. The desire to leave something behind was evident in the actions of most of these respondents. Ingman, Benjamin and Lusky (1999) predicted this motivation for senior activists. It is not clear from this study whether this desire to leave something

positive behind is limited to the motivations of senior activists, or whether it is a motivation for activists of any age. Part of environmental activism is attempting to preserve or create a better natural environment for the present and the future. Leaving a legacy may be a part of activism for all ages. It is possible that the desire becomes greater as one comes closer to the end of one's life, but this is not shown by this study.

One motivation that did seem to increase with age was a sense of urgency about the work that was being done by these respondents. They believed there was an important reason for them to be involved in activism, and as they reached the end of their lives this importance seemed to grow. Adding to this was the evidence they saw of continued degradation of the environment. These activists had seen many changes in the environment over their lifetimes. They had been aware of environmental problems for many years. These two factors combined to increase their sense of urgency about the work they were doing. This urgency is a unique aspect of being a senior involved with the environmental movement. This is not limited to seniors but does seem to be stronger for them.

In looking at the circumstances and motivations of the seniors interviewed in this study, and comparing them to the literature reviewed earlier, it seems that they are consistent with many of the previous findings. Most of the motivations documented in previous studies are evident in the lives of these seniors. Rather than simply providing support for those previous findings, this study helps us to gain some insight into the relationship between activist behavior and age.

How have my original research questions been addressed by this project? What have I learned about why some seniors are involved in the environmental movement? How does old age effect their involvement? It seems that much of what motivates seniors is concern for the world around them, for their children, the future and even themselves. The concerns that they have about the environment are seen as having an impact on their lives and the earth. They have a sense that there is a problem with the current state of the world, and that they have some power to change things for the better, or at least a hope that they can change things for the better.

Has anything been gained by looking at them as senior environmentalists rather than simply environmentalists? Overall seniors are not that unique from younger activists. Factors other than age have a greater impact on their activism. Stronger themes in the activism of these respondents were upbringing, integration of activism into other areas of their lives, and emotional responses to concerns. These themes can be, as shown in the literature review, influential in the activism of people of all ages. This demonstrates that environmental activism is not just the realm of younger people. Concern for the environment can be just as salient for old people to bring them to action as it can for younger. If age has been thought of as a barrier to environmental concern and action, this research demonstrates that this is untrue. Both old and young people can be affected by concern for the environment, just as others of both ages can be unconcerned for the environment. Age does not need to be an issue when considering who is and is not interested in issues related to the environment.

Despite the finding that age is not a strong factor in these respondents' understanding of their activist behavior, it does become obvious that age plays a role. People of older age are more strongly impacted by some things than are younger people. Seniors have a greater experience of how the natural environment has changed as they have witnessed a longer period of change. Accompanying this experience of environmental change is an increased sense of urgency in the need to slow or stop the rate of destruction. This urgency may also be related to a better understanding of the finite nature of their own lives as they come closer to the ends of their lives. As a result of life changes seniors have more free time which could be devoted to activism. Age, although not a motivating factor on its own coincides with other changes that do influence and mediate the motivation of activists.

To understand this finding about the impact of aging and old age on activist behavior, I draw on Sharon Kaufman's theory of *The Ageless Self* (1986). As I have pointed out, being older is not a salient factor in the activism of these senior respondents. For almost all of them, their activism began at an early point in their lives. Their reasons for becoming involved related to their beliefs about and concerns for the environment. These beliefs have remained throughout their activist careers. Increasing age has not influenced any changes to these beliefs; rather things that accompany increasing age such as experience and increasing awareness of issues have influenced their activism.

Kaufman's research focused on the impact of age on identity formation among seniors. She interviewed 60 white, middle-class, Californians, over the age of 70 about their life histories. In analyzing these life histories she found that the self presented by these seniors in the telling of their lives was not grounded in age but rather in other

themes that have been present throughout the life span. These themes are life areas around which individuals interpret a meaningful understanding of themselves. Examples of themes include occupation/working, family ties, friendships or education. Many different respondents had the same themes but interpreted them differently. Age is never a theme.

In the same way that age is present in the identify formation of the respondents in Kaufman's study, so age is also present in the activism of the respondents in this study. Kaufman explains her findings:

> All research participants made it clear to me that *aging* per se is not a substantive issue in their own lives. They do not, now that they are over 70, conceive of themselves in a context of *aging* and act accordingly. Rather, they deal with specific problems, changes, and disabilities as they arise, just as they have been doing throughout their lives, and they interpret these changes and problems in the light of already established themes. It appears that the concept of aging is too abstract, too impersonal to be an integral part of identity. This is not to say that my informants ignore or deny their own aging and the discomforts and limitations which arise in that process. Nor does it mean that the changes experienced in old age have no psychological effects. But while dealing with the physical and mental manifestations of old age, old people also maintain an ageless sense of self that transcends change by providing continuity and meaning. (1986: 161)

This quote is a summation of Kaufman's theory about the role of age in the formation of identity. Age itself is not an aspect of identity, but rather life events and physical changes that occur with age create the situation in which identity must be re-evaluated and re-interpreted using the pre-existing themes.

In this same way it is not age that causes respondents to think or act differently with regards to their activism, but rather the life events and physical changes that impact these seniors' activism. Becoming a grandparent, rather than being old, focuses the

motivation for being an environmental activist onto children and their families. Retiring, which accompanies old age provides more free time to devote to activism.

For Andrew, retiring left him with an empty space in his life. Activism took the place of work in his life. It provided him with new relationships and a new source of meaning and purpose. For both Fred and Don, remaining active with their concerns for the environment meant that they were able to maintain their connection to work. With retirement they both had to adjust their understanding of their role as professors and researchers. Upon retiring they changed the activities they did. In pre-retirement they taught and guided research projects while after they retired they raised money for maintaining research sites or wrote books. With the change of retirement, their activism changed. For Don this happened at a younger age than for Fred. It is the act of retiring that changed their activism, not their ages.

Don spoke most of an increased sense of urgency in his desire to participate in activism. He did not talk of it in terms of being older, but rather in seeing an increasing rate of environmental destruction. Through his experiences of environmental degradation he felt a greater urgency for the work he was doing. He also spoke of being aware of his limited time to devote to his activism, as he witnessed others incurring physical and mental disabilities that can come with age. It was not being older but rather the awareness of the limitations that can come with aging that increased his urgency.

Many of the women respondents spoke of how being older left them with more free time from family responsibilities. Activism could be seen as taking on some of that caregiving role as they were motivated by the needs of their children and grandchildren. It also provided them with purpose outside of caring for their families. In these examples

it is the changes that come with age, not age itself that has affected the activism of these respondents.

The fact that these respondents were not involved in age-specific environmental groups demonstrates that their concern and identity as activists comes first from their concerns rather than their age group. These are environmental activists who became seniors, not seniors who are environmental activists. Environmental concern and action are the themes that have been the source of consistency in these respondents' lives as they have faced the changes and challenges of growing older. In order to remain involved in activism for their environmental concerns, they had to negotiate these changes and reinterpret their meaning of activism

In the cases of Marie, Angela and Eunice, old age was a time of freedom from responsibilities and social constraints. They were enjoying the activism they were involved in more than they had at any other time in their lives. Their activism was more fun as they found old age freeing them to be involved in new ways.

Ian and Cathy used their accumulated experience in the environmental movement to embark on a new environmental project. Using their expertise and well-established network of supporters, their old age was a time for a new and exciting project. They used their rich supply of resources, the result of a lifetime of activism, to initiate a hopeful project.

For Kerri and Norman, health problems restricted their involvement. For this reason Kerri was less likely to call herself an activist when I contacted her even though they were both still quite involved. Faced with the physical realities of aging, their level of activism had to decrease.

These different negotiations of aging produce different activism. As age has brought the experience of newfound freedom and a strong set of resources for Marie, Angela, Eunice, Ian and Cathy, they have all experienced new excitement in their activism. Kerri and Norman remain committed and concerned, but have had to figure out how to step back from a high level of involvement. Rather than simply quitting activism they have decided on reduced involvement or more passive involvement to accommodate the changes of old age. This understanding of the impact of aging on environmental activism shows that environmental activism does not change because an individual is old, but rather activists reinterpret their involvement in terms of the changes and experiences that come with age.

Where Do We Go From Here?

This research project was framed with the expectation that this would be the beginning of further research into aging and environmental activism. It was designed to test whether there was the possibility of and/or the need for more research into this area. Findings from these respondents point out areas for further investigation.

Seniors' Contributions to Activism

Respondents shared about some of the unique aspects of being seniors in the movement. Being older provides them with unique tools to be used in the movement. Their age and experience allow them to make an important and unique contribution to environmental activism.

Experience was the main contribution to the movement of being older and involved in the movement:

> And we have experience because those, those things that happened in the past taught us. (Marie)
>
> I've also learned in meetings, particularly helps when you're older, never raise your voice. If you talk quietly everyone will, has to listen to you, to hear what you're saying. I don't mean you whisper, you know, but you keep your voice down. Talk in a soft voice. You get far better attention. (Edith)

This refers to general life experience that would be true of any older person who was involved with environmentalism, but also included some unique experience that comes from being involved with the movement for a number of years. Age alone is not the unique contributor in this case but accompanies a lifetime of commitment to the movement and a lifetime of experience from which these respondents have gained important lessons.

The interview with Edith, Lucy and Andrew showed that being older has advantages because of the common perceptions and beliefs people have about older age and seniors. When this topic came up in the interview, Edith told a story demonstrating how her age and gender helped to take some people by surprise:

> Andrew: [When you're older] you're expected to be set in your ways. You're expected to be set in your ways and a little dotty.
>
> Edith: Right, so you can sometimes take them by surprise when you know more than they expect you to. (Agreement from Lucy) Or when you um don't, ah, yeah, I'm thinking of when they were going to put a gas line, ah, pipeline right through [a natural area] a couple of summers ago and the men came up from the company and they came to a meeting in Red Deer and there were three ladies there when they walked into the room.
>
> And they came in all smiles and you could just about see the thinking, 'Ah, this is going to be easy.' They went out with their tails between their legs [laughing]. You know, we really shook them because they were not expecting the

> knowledge or the determination. And, I mean everything they said, that we said 'Listen very carefully.' To them, we said, 'Yes but…' or 'You have forgotten to take into account so and so.' We just slaughtered them and they weren't expecting it.

Here Edith used her position as a senior to work for her cause. By using the stereotypes people have of seniors, and by challenging that stereotype, she was able to further her cause.

The emergence of this theme highlights the importance of bringing seniors into environmental activism and to maintain the involvement of others. Otherwise these unique contributions are lost. This points to an area for further investigation: how do seniors see their contributions to the movement and how are those contributions perceived by younger activists? In what ways are seniors' contributions to the environmental movement unique from those of younger activists?

Senior Involvement

Those respondents who commented on the age composition of the environmental movement said that the groups that they belonged to had a number of seniors involved. The groups used as the reference were natural history groups. It is possible that these types of environmental groups would be more likely to have older people involved for reasons other than environmental activism such as general interest in nature (e.g., bird watching). In speaking of the involvement of seniors, Edith said:

> A lot of them bird watch and go out and see pretty flowers and they'll make cookies or something like that but that is all they're going to… They do not want to be politically involved because either this is their recreation time from off work or they've retired, and now I've retired, I'm going to enjoy life, I'm not going to take on any responsibilities. So [this naturalist group], since we're the only conservationist organization really in the area, so the 10

> percent who are politically active are stretched to the limit…
>
> And the others, you know, they like to hear reports and you might occasionally get them to write a letter, um, but a lot of them are rural people and rural people on the whole, I find, do not write letters and do not like putting their name on anything or ringing up and complaining to their MLA unless it's about the farm crisis. So they don't want to be involved so this is one of our greatest problems. (Edith)

It seems that although there were a number of older members in this group, the number who were active was much lower.

Most of the people interviewed worked with other seniors in general social justice groups or with friends and acquaintances who were older, as was the case with Cathy and Ian in their business. These are indicators that there are other seniors involved with environmental concerns, but this does not give a good estimate of the relative percentage of seniors involved as activists. As well, it does not indicate where such activist seniors are located. No uniquely senior environmental group was found in my search. This indicates the value of conducting a survey to determine the actual extent of senior involvement in environmental activism. Are older people more or less involved? This is an important question given my findings that age does not need to be a barrier to concern or participation. As well, there are important benefits for seniors in being involved and they can provide unique contributions to the movement. This could be an important step in understanding more about the age dynamics in the environmental movement.

Intergenerational Interaction

Respondents spoke about how well activists of different ages work together. They shared positive examples of interactions between different aged activists. Edith's story is

particularly poignant on this issue. In commenting about the tolerance among activists she said:

> They talk about tolerance. I, you know, your beliefs, your race, your…, you know, I mean, age. The, the, I found this right through environmental things, your age is totally immaterial. I've worked a lot with kids and I don't mean just the kids, teaching kids, I meant going out lecturing with them, they would do the first half hour and I'd do the, you know, on an equal basis with young people and so on. And, and, we learn a lot from each other.
>
> And as one of the ones said to me, I was, we were going to a school and I just knew this young chaps name, I hadn't a clue who he was and he, same with me. And we agreed to met in the lobby and I did, as I quite often do, I, um, dressed to look very establishment because it always surprises people. But going into a school, too, a high school. And I met this young chap who was 18 in tattered jeans and long hair and a rucksack on his back. And we stood and looked at each other and we roared with laughter.
>
> And I think in the next two years we hit every high school in Calgary, and we, we agreed we would go just as we were. He looking scruffy and me looking, you know, politely dressed and, ah, so, as he said, 'If we teach them nothing else we teach that there's, that there are no, no barriers in [environmental activism]. (Edith)

This indicates that activists are tolerant of the differences in each other; different ages do not seem to be a hindrance to involvement. Respondents also mentioned that there were benefits to working with people of different ages. For example, younger activists have more energy while older activists have more free time and experience.

Although respondents said that different ages can work together, the groups that these respondents are involved with are mostly made up of seniors. They may be able to work together but there is something keeping these respondents in groups separated by age. It may be that even though interaction is positive, there are some differences that make it easier to continue in separate groups. Or it may be that it is more enjoyable to

participate with people who are for the most part of the same age group. This would allow for individuals to have more in common than simply their concern for the environment, therefore strengthening friendships insulating against withdrawal from the movement.

This theme is not a main focus of my research, but indicates an area for further investigation. It could be important to investigate how age affects interactions in the activist community. How do people of different ages work together? What are the implications of this for getting people of different ages involved in activism? Are my examples of positive interaction typical, or do they stand out because they are unique experiences, either because there are few cases of working with people of different ages or because intergenerational interactions are usually neutral or negative experiences? As well, it could be fruitful to examine how the interactions between different age groups in the movement are perceived. Do seniors outside of the movement feel that they would be welcomed or valued as a contributor to activism? Findings here could be important in recruiting other seniors to environmental activism.

It is obvious from this study that seniors are present in the environmental movement. There is an interest in environmental issues among some seniors. One example from this study, Andrew, suggests a possibility for older people to become involved for the first time, but for most there is likely some earlier interest. In terms of Kaufman's understanding of the self, this would mean that either environmental concern or some other type of volunteering or activism would have been present earlier in life. If this is the case, it is possible that environmental activism could fit into this previously existing theme of the self. For Andrew, he had been aware of environmental issues for a

long time, and was involved with raising awareness among his students. Upon retiring, he felt the need to find some other kind of involvement, activism. A potential research question could be how do seniors become involved in environmental activism, if at all? This research would expand the understanding of age and activism found in this study.

Conclusion

This research has been very interesting. Although it provides only a few tools for the recruitment of seniors to the environmental movement, it does help to illuminate the experiences of life long activists. More than this, it provide a good illustration of the concept of age as an 'empty variable' in real life situations (Neugarten 1977; Neugarten 1985). Life events accompanying age are the real explanatory factors in looking at activism among seniors rather than those activists understanding of their age. Age is not a meaningful influencer on these activists' behavior just as Kaufman (1986) found in understanding identity formation.

Instead, just as they have throughout their lives, these activists must deal with life changes and renegotiate their involvement with activism in order to stay involved. Without such renegotiations their continued involvement would be impossible. Their involvement must alter and change just as their life circumstances do. These individuals have persevered in a difficult pursuit, that of an environmental activist. Their tenacity, conviction and enthusiasm are to be admired and emulated.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

As you read in the consent form, my purpose in conducting these interviews is to find out about seniors who are involved in environmental activism. Specifically, to find out about their motivations for involvement.

Before we get started, I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary. If there are questions you do not want to answer you do not have to. If you want to stop the interview at anytime please let me know.

I will be taking notes while we talk but would also like to record our interview to be sure that I do not miss anything that is said. Is this all right with you?

Do you have any questions before we start?

QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
To begin I have a few questions about your environmental concern: What first prompted your concern for the environment?	What environmental issues have you been concerned with in your life?
How have you been involved in environmental activism?	What types of environmental projects have you worked with? What is the current/most recent project you are working on? How are you/were you involved in this project? Describe some of the other projects that you have worked on?
Some people are concerned about the environment but do not take action on their concerns. What in your life has encouraged you to be active about your concerns?	Are there things in your life that hindered you from being active? What are they? Who are the people who encourage your involvement in activism? Who are the people who may have discouraged you involvement?
How would you say your involvement with environmental issues has changed since you first became involved?	Do you have different concerns? Are you more or less involved? How so?
How does being old help your activism? How does it hinder your activism?	

What motivates you to continue working for the environment?	
The number of environmental problems must seem overwhelming at times. How do you deal with feelings of discouragement?	
What benefits have you gained from being involved?	
What drawbacks have there been to being involved?	
How would you define the term "environmental activist"?	Would you consider yourself an environmental activist? What makes you say that?
Are you involved in other social and/or political activism?	What issues are you concerned with? How do these concerns relate to your concern for the environment?
Next, I have some questions about the concern and involvement of other with environmental issues Looking at your experiences, how would you say we can encourage people to become involved or to stay involved in environmental activism?	
Are there unique things needed to encourage older people to be involved in environmental activism?	How can we encourage seniors?
Do you know other seniors involved in environmental activism?	Have most of them been involved throughout their lives or have most just become involved recently?
I have only a few more questions about your background Where did you grow up?	
How old are you?	
What is your ethnic background?	What is your ethnic heritage?
What level of education do you have?	

What has been your main job or career?	Are you retired? **IF YES →** How long have you been retired? **IF NO →** What is your current job? How many hours a week do you work?

That is all of my questions. Do you have any other questions or comments?

Would you like a copy of the findings from the study? Where should I send them?

Thank you very much for you time.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Department of Sociology, University of Alberta
December 2000

This study is about the motivations of seniors who participate in environmental activism. Christy Nickerson, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta, is conducting this study as part of the requirements for completion of her Masters of Arts degree.

For this study, Christy will be interviewing approximately 20 seniors to gain insight into their motivations for being involved in environmental activism. The questions will be about your current and past involvement in activists activities, reasons for being involved, difficulties with participating and general opinions about the involvement of seniors in environmental activism. The interview will also ask general questions about your education, work history, and so on.

The survey will be conducted as a face-to-face interview, which could last two hours. We will arrange for a time that is convenient for you and schedule an appointment at your home or any other convenient place in Edmonton.

The findings of the study will be published in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may be published in scientific journals. Christy will provide participants with a summary of the findings if they so desire.

Please understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. All information will be held confidential except when professional codes of ethics or legislation require reporting. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, you don't have to answer them. You have the option to stop the interview at any time. The tapes and notes from the interview will be kept for three months after the study is completed in a secure area accessible by the researcher. Then the researcher will destroy the tapes and notes.

If you have any questions about the survey, you may either call Christy Nickerson at (780) 434-8213 or her supervisor, Dr. Harvey Krahn, professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta, at (780) 492-3315.

DECLARATION

I agree that I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in the survey about the motivations of senior who participate in environmental activism conducted by Christy Nickerson, graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. I understand that the information given by me will be kept in strictest confidence by the researcher.

_____ _____

(Print Name) (Date)

_____

(Signature)